This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

AH 43TV 8

HARVARD
DIVINITY
SCHOOL
Andover-Harvard
Theological Library

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

AN

EXPOSITION

OF THE

HISTORICAL WRITINGS

OF THE

NEW TESTAMENT,

WITH REFLECTIONS SUBJOINED TO EACH SECTION,

BY THE LATE

REV. TIMOTHY KENRICK.

WITH

MEMOIRS OF THE AUTHOR.

—

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

—

CONTAINING THOSE PARTS OF LUKE WHICH ARE NOT FOUND IN THE OTHER EVANGELISTS, AND THE ENTIRE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO JOHN.

LONDON:
PRINTED FOR LONGMAN, HURST, REES, AND ORME,
PATERNOSTER-ROW.

1807.

Digitized by Google

SEP. 9 1898

(624)

557.6
Kenrick
v. 2

Digitized by Google

AN

EXPOSITION,

&c. &c.

Luke iii. 1—14.

LUKE, the author of the history before us, and likewise of the book which is called the Acts of the Apostles, was a Jew by religious profession, the companion and fellow-labourer of Paul. He was well acquainted also with the other apostles, although not one of their number. Some of the things which are here related he might learn from them, particularly what took place in the early part of Christ's public ministry; the rest he might learn from his own observation, from attending Christ as one of his disciples. The authenticity of his history, however, does not depend upon our knowledge of this circumstance, but upon the assurance which we have, that it was received as authentic by persons of the age in which he lived, who knew his character and qualifications, or were well acquainted with the transactions of which he professes to give an account. Several other things are said of him, besides what I have just mentioned, but not with any degree of certainty. Thus he is supposed to be a physician, because Paul, in his epistle to the Colossians, iv. 14, speaks of Luke, the beloved physician; but he is not described under that character in any of the other epistles where he is mentioned, nor in the book of Acts.

Digitized by Google

It has also been supposed that he was one of the two disciples whom our Lord joined after his resurrection, while they were going to Emmaus, because Luke tells us that the name of one of them was Cleopas, but makes no mention of the name of the other, from motives of modesty, as it has been imagined, because it was himself. It has been said by some of the Fathers, that Luke was one of the seventy disciples whom Jesus sent out to preach; but this idea probably arose from Luke's being the only one of the evangelists who has mentioned this mission. Others have supposed that he was one of the teachers of the church at Antioch, because we find in their number a Lucius of Cyrene; a name which very much resembles that of Luke, having only something more of the Roman termination: Acts xiii. 1. But these two last suppositions do not very well agree with each other: for the seventy disciples whom Jesus sent out to preach, were inhabitants of Galilee, like the apostles; and it is not likely that Jesus would join to them a foreigner of Cyrene in Africa. Having mentioned what we know of the historian, I now proceed to the history, beginning at that part of it which is universally acknowledged to be his.

Luke iii. 1—14.

1. Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Cæsar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judæa,

Luke, who was better acquainted with the forms of historical composition than the other evangelists, here fixes the period at which John the Baptist began to preach, by telling us in what year of the reign of the Emperor Tiberius it took place. The reason of referring this date to the Roman empire was, that the country of Judæa was under the dominion of the Romans.

Herod the Great had been put in possession of Judæa and the neighbouring regions which he governed, by the Romans. When he died he divided his territory by

Digitized by Google

will between his three sons, who were called Archelaus, Herod and Philip. These were confirmed in their separate jurisdictions by the same authority which had given him the whole. But Archelaus, having been guilty of great oppression in his administration, was deposed by the Romans, and the country which had been subject to him reduced to a Roman province, under the name of Judæa. The two other brothers continued to possess the territory which had been left them by their father, which the evangelist next proceeds to mention.

And Herod being tetrarch of Galilee,

This is the prince whose name is for ever stigmatized with the crime of beheading John the Baptist. He is the person also to whom Jesus was sent by Pilate at his trial. The title of Tetrarch was originally given to one who presided over the fourth part of a kingdom; but it came afterward to signify, as it does here, one who presided over any part of a country.

And his brother Philip, tetrarch of Iturea and of the region of Trachonitis; *two countries lying upon the opposite side of the sea of Galilee*; and Lysanias, the tetrarch of Abilene.

This was a small province on the borders of Syria: it is mentioned here, because it was part of Palestine, or because many Jews resided there.

2. Annas and Caiaphas being the high priests, the word of God came unto John, the son of Zacharias, in the wilderness.

It appears from the Old Testament that the law of Moses required that there should be one high priest, and no more; and that he should continue in office for life. But Luke says here that there were two high priests at this time. To account for this language, it has been

Digitized by Google

observed, that the high priest possessing the chief civil power under the Romans, it was usual for them to remove him, whenever he did not give satisfaction, and to put another, but of the same family, into his place. The person, however, who had been once high priest retained that title as long as he lived, although he had ceased to exercise any authority. This was the situation of Annas, or, as Josephus calls him, Ananus: for he had been put out of office eleven years before by Gratas the Roman governor, and his son-in-law Caiaphas raised into his place; but being still regarded by the people as high priest, notwithstanding this unjust removal, he retained the name. This interpretation is further confirmed by observing that Josephus uses the same language, speaking frequently of the high priests, as if there were two or more, when in reality there could be but one.

In saying that the word of God came unto John, the evangelist has adopted the language used by the writers of the Old Testament, when they mean to express that God sends a divine message to any one: for the usual form of speech upon these occasions is, that the word of the Lord came to such a person. He went into the wilderness, probably, to prepare himself for receiving a divine revelation.

3. And he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.

That is, he came to all the cities and towns in the neighbourhood of Jordan, such as Bethabara and Ænon, insisting upon the necessity of the inhabitants repenting, in order to preserve themselves from those calamities which God was about to bring upon the nation for their sins, and to prepare for the kingdom of the Messiah, which he was sent to announce; and showing them the propriety of submitting to the ordinance of baptism, as an expression of that purity of heart and life which they now engaged to maintain.

The Jews baptized all proselytes to their religion from idolatry, as a symbolical expression of their being

Digitized by Google

brought from an impure state into one that was pure and holy. By administering this ceremony to Jews, John intimated that they had departed as much from true piety as if they had been heathens, and that it was necessary that they should undergo the like change.

4. As it is written in the book of the words of Esaias the prophet, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths strait.

5. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low; and the crooked shall be made strait, and the rough ways shall be made smooth.

In this language the prophet Isaiah had foretold the preaching of John, the design of it, and the effect which it should have upon men's minds, together with the place where he should make his appearance. There is an evident allusion in these words to the office of pioneers, who were sent before, to prepare the road for great monarchs, when they moved from one place to another: for, as these made the road smooth where it was rough, by removing obstacles, strait, where it was winding, and lowered hills where they were steep and difficult of ascent; so John, by his preaching and baptizing, should remove from the minds of many of the Jews those errors and prejudices which would have prevented the reception of the Messiah, and hereby should prepare the way for accomplishing the designs of God, whose messenger and representative he was.

6. And all flesh shall see the salvation of God.

That is, all men shall behold that scheme of salvation which God has provided for his people. The language

Digitized by Google

of the evangelist varies a little here from that of the prophet, being taken from the Greek translation, and not from the Hebrew.

7. Then said he to the multitude that came forth to be baptized of him, O generation of vipers, *or, as it would be better rendered,* "*O brood of vipers,*" who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?

Matthew tells us that this language was addressed by John to the Pharisees and Sadducees, to whose character the severity of it seems more suitable than to that of the people in general.

8. Bring forth, therefore, fruits worthy of repentance; *that is, Since you have been warned, bring forth such good works as become a sincere repentance;* and begin not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.

9. And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees, *rather,* "*at the root,*" *being put there ready for use;* every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit, is hewn down and cast into the fire.

10. And the people asked him, saying, What shall we do then? *What good works shall we perform to evidence the sincerity of our repentance, to save ourselves*

Digitized by Google

from the impending calamities? He answereth, and saith unto them,

11. He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none, and he that hath meat let him do likewise.

He that hath a superfluity of the good things of this life, let him impart some portion of what he has to those who are destitute of them, and suffer much distress from their wants. He directs them to show the sincerity of their repentance by acts of beneficence, which are the great end of religion, and the most acceptable offering which we can present to the Divine Being. He instances in food and raiment, not because these are the only means of doing good, but because they comprise the principal wants of mankind, and because it is in food and dress that men are most apt to offend by their extravagance. The prophet Daniel gives similar advice to Nebuchadnezzar, in answer to a like question, saying, "Break off thy sins by repentance, and thine iniquities by showing mercy to the poor." When John directs the people to give away one out of two coats, he does not mean to prohibit them from keeping more than one, but to forbid retaining superfluities, when others want necessaries.

12. Then came also publicans to be baptized, and said unto him, Master, "*Teacher*," what shall we do?

13. And he said, Exact no more than that which is appointed you.

The tax-gatherers, in the exercise of their office, frequently compelled people to pay more than the law required, and were hereby guilty of great oppression.—John warns them to beware of this crime, to which men of their profession were strongly tempted.

14. And the soldiers likewise demanded of him, saying, And what shall

Digitized by Google

we do? And he said unto them, Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages.

Commit violence on no man's person or property, without just authority; nor endeavour to secure that authority by accusing innocent persons. Be content with your pay; and do not murmur or mutiny against your officers, if they do not bestow upon you largesses to procure your favour or good will.

REFLECTIONS.

1. From the passage of Scripture which has been explained, we learn that men in every situation of life have peculiar temptations to guard against, and peculiar duties to perform: to each class of people John gives separate admonitions and cautions. The rich are apt to confine their whole attention to themselves, and forget or overlook the wants of their poorer brethren, although destitute of food and cloathing: while the poor are often discontented with their wages, and murmur against the rich, even when they grant them all the assistance which their circumstances will permit, and which they can equitably claim. Those who are in power are disposed to abuse it, and those who are subject to authority frequently resist it without occasion. Let every man, therefore, consider what temptations his situation in life exposes him to, and what duties it requires from him; and these let him be careful to perform. Let the rich have a due consideration of the wants of the poor, and be ready to relieve them, that in heaven they may have a more enduring substance. Let the poor be contented with their wages, remembering that it is what they have agreed to receive. Let those who are invested with civil authority of any kind recollect that it is given them for the benefit of those over whom it is

Digitized by Google

exercised, and not for the gratification of their own private passions or interests. Let those also who are subject to authority remember, that power, thus employed, is justly exercised, and that resistance to it is criminal. Let soldiers, in particular, remember that they are appointed to guard the persons and protect the property of individuals, and not to oppress and injure them; to defend the community against the unjust attacks of foreign nations, and not to invade the rights of unoffending people, or to vindicate the private quarrels of princes. Let parents remember the attention and tenderness which they owe to their children; and children, the gratitude and obedience which are due to parents. Let masters have a due consideration of the circumstances of their servants, and exact no more from them than their strength and comfort will allow them to perform. Let them exercise authority with mildness, excuse their involuntary offences, and show kindness to them in distress. Let servants also be faithful to their masters, not defrauding them of their property, nor destroying it by thoughtless extravagance or wasteful negligence. Let them be tender of the reputation and attentive to the wants of those whom they serve. We learn,

2. That the practice of these duties by individuals, is the best evidence of the sincerity of their repentance; and the general performance of them by a community, the most effectual method of saving a nation from ruin. These are the fruits worthy of a profession of repentance, which John required from his disciples; and they are what God still requires from all those who profess sorrow for sin, and look for his favour. Without them, our prayers and fastings, our tears and confessions, are unmeaning forms and useless parade.—Creatures, indeed, weak and ignorant as ourselves, they may deceive; but with respect to God, they only serve to mark the hypocrisy of the mind, and to increase his displeasure.

Happy, on the contrary, are the individuals who accompany profession of sorrow for sin with reformation of manners, and with a faithful discharge of those du-

Digitized by Google

ties which belong to their station in life! However meaft their profession or condition, whether they be publicans or soldiers, or belong to a still lower class in society, they are acceptable in the sight of God, and will enjoy his favour and esteem.

Happy also is the community of which they are members; they are the foundation of its security and prosperity. On the other hand, where these duties are neglected; where the rich are insensible to the wants of the poor, or the poor envy the wealth of the rich, and are discontented with their lot; where those who are invested with power, forget the design with which it was bestowed, and employ it to harrass and oppress, not to protect and benefit; where subjects are dissatisfied with the conduct of their rulers, and are ready to resist their authority; where confessions of sin and forms of religion are substituted in the place of public and private virtue and reformation of manners; the country or kingdom in which these vices prevail is not far from ruin. The ties which bind together the several parts of society are broken; the foundations of the state are undermined, and the building is ready to fall; by the first gust which arises it will be overturned: neither religious ancestors nor religious privileges can save it from destruction. The Jewish nation has long been an awful monument of this truth; and every other nation which is reduced to the same circumstances, must expect to experience a like fate.

Luke iii. 15—18.	corresponds with	Matt. iii. 11—12.
iii. 19, 20. - - - - - -		xiii. 10—12.
		John iii. 24.
iv. 1—13. - - - - - -		Matt. iv. 1—11.
iv. 14—30. - - - - - -		iv. 54—.

Luke iv. 31—37. v. 1—11.

31. And he *(i. e. Jesus)* came down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee, and taught them on the sabbath-days.

Digitized by Google

32. And they were astonished at his doctrine; for his word was with power, *or, rather,* **"*with authority.*"**

Jesus Christ, being now only beginning his ministry, and little known, confined his instructions to the sabbath-day, when the people were at rest from their common employments, and assembled together in their synagogues, which, like our places of worship, were erected in every part of the country. When his fame was more spread abroad, and the people crowded to hear him wherever he went, he preached to them every day of the week. The people were struck with his manner of teaching; because his discourses were with power, or, rather, with authority; that is, delivered in an authoritative manner; in the language of a person who had received a commission from God; and not like the Scribes, whom they had been accustomed to hear, and who only pretended to interpret what had been delivered by former prophets*.

33. And in the synagogue there was a man which had a spirit of an unclean dæmon;

As the disorders of madness and epilepsy were ascribed by the Jews to the spirits of dead men, who were supposed to take possession of the living, with a malevolent and wicked purpose, they might receive the epithet of unclean, on account of their being supposed to be of an immoral character, or, perhaps, because they were supposed to cause the persons afflicted with madness to avoid the society of men, and to defile themselves continually with objects esteemed by the Jews unclean; as was the case with the man who lived among the tombs.

And cried out with a loud voice,

34. Saying, Let us alone! what have we to do with thee, *or, as it is better rendered,* **"*Ah! what hast thou to do with us;*"**

* Matt. vii. 29.

Digitized by Google

thou Jesus of Nazareth? Art thou come to destroy us, *or*, "*to punish us?*" I know thee who thou art, the holy one of God.

This dæmoniac, who was mad, and subject likewise to epileptic fits, had intervals of sanity, as appears from his being allowed to be present in the synagogue. During these intervals he might learn the character and pretensions of Jesus, and might know, in particular, that he cured some who were possessed of dæmons. Being mad, he fancies himself to be the dæmon by which he was supposed to be possessed, and personates his character. As dæmons were considered as the spirits of dead men, who were sometime to be punished, he is afraid that Jesus is come to inflict this punishment immediately, and therefore says, Art thou come to destroy or punish us? In the same manner as the Gadarene dæmoniac said, Art thou come to torment us before the time? It is not always possible to account for the language and actions of madmen: yet this was the idea probably which filled him with apprehension. In calling Jesus the holy one of God, he may refer to Psalm xvi. 10, where David calls the Messiah the holy one; or to Daniel, ix. 24, where he is called the most holy. To suppose that it was the devil who gave Jesus this honourable appellation, and proclaimed his character in a public assembly, would be to suppose that he counteracted his own purposes, and is totally inconsistent with the ideas formed of the artfulness and cunning of that being.

35. And Jesus rebuked him, saying, Hold thy peace, and come out of him.

Jesus addresses the dæmon, and tells him to be silent, and to leave the man: this language strongly implies that Jesus entertained the same notions respecting mad persons and epileptics as the rest of his countrymen.

And when the dæmon had thrown him in the midst, he came out of him, and hurt him not.

Digitized by Google

The disorder with which this person was afflicted, as we have already observed, was madness, but accompanied, as appears hence, with epileptic fits, which are often the consequence of long continued insanity*. The agitation of mind produced by seeing Jesus, and by being addressed by him, brought on a paroxysm of this disorder, in which he fell down, as is usual with these persons, and was torn, according to the account of Mark, which is further descriptive of the epilepsy; but he was not hurt: for the supposed dæmoniac was cured by the miraculous power of Jesus; which is here expressed by the dæmon coming out of him.

36. And they were all amazed, and spake among themselves, saying, What a word is this, *or, rather,* "*What a thing is this!*" *expressing their surprize at the miracle performed:* for with authority and power he commandeth the unclean spirits, and they come out!

The prophets mentioned in the Old Testament performed many miracles, by healing diseases, and even, in a few instances, raising the dead: but we read of no example of their restoring madmen to their right mind, as Jesus did. This kind of miracle, therefore, excited an extraordinary degree of surprise in the minds of the spectators.

37. And the fame of him went out into every place of the country round about.

Luke iv. 38—. corresponds with Matt. viii. 14—18.

Luke v. 1—11.

1. And it came to pass that, as the people pressed upon him, to hear the

* See Farmer on Dæmoniacs, p. 90.

Digitized by Google

word of God, he stood by the lake of Gennesareth;

2. And saw two ships, *or, rather,* "*vessels:*" *for they were not of a size to correspond with our idea of ships*; standing by the lake; but the fishermen were gone out of them, and were washing their nets.

This lake of Gennesareth is the same as is called in the other evangelists the sea of Galilee, and the sea of Tiberias; and it was in the towns and villages on the borders of this lake that Jesus chiefly exercised his ministry. The fame of the miracles mentioned in the last chapter being spread abroad, great multitudes, from all quarters, assembled round Jesus, to hear his instructions and to see his wonderful works. The curiosity of the multitude to hear him was so great, that they thronged each other, and pressed upon Jesus; so that he found it necessary to remove to a situation where he could address them without being thus incommoded. The discourses of Christ are here called by the evangelist the word of God; and with good reason: for Christ spoke in the name of God, asserting that he was sent by God to instruct the people, and that the sentiments which he delivered were communicated to him by the Father. In regard, however, to the nature and causes of diseases, and the ordinary affairs of life, there is no occasion for supposing that he had any extraordinary assistance, or that he knew more than other men. The design of his mission was to teach men religion, and not natural philosophy: his divine powers, therefore, were confined to that object.

3. And he entered into one of the vessels, which was Simon's, and prayed him that he would thrust out a little

Digitized by Google

from the land; and he sat down, and taught the people out of the vessel.

4. Now when he had left speaking, he said unto Simon, Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught.

Having had the use of the vessel, Jesus now proceeded to reward the owners, in the only way, probably, in which he was able to do it, by procuring them a miraculous draught of fishes, which might afford them a suitable compensation, and, at the same time, give them fresh and more striking proofs of his divine mission.

5. And Simon, answering, said unto him, Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing; nevertheless, at thy word I will let down the net.

6. And when they had done this, they enclosed a great multitude of fishes; and their net brake; *rather*, "*was going to break:*"

Had it been actually broken, the fish would have been lost, and there would have been no occasion to call for the assistance of their companions. So large a draught of fishes was not a thing absolutely impossible, in the common course of nature, so far as we know; yet, as it was by the desire of Jesus that the net was let down, after he had been informed that they had caught nothing the preceding night, it is evident that he entertained an intention of working a miracle; and there is every reason to think that the event which took place was the effect of his extraordinary power.

7. And they beckoned unto their partners, who were in the other vessel,

Digitized by Google

that they should come and help them; and they came, and filled both the vessels, so that they began to sink.

8. When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord.

Peter, perceiving by the great draught of fishes that Jesus was possessed of a miraculous power, of the most extraordinary nature, was greatly alarmed, lest, discerning the imperfections of his character, he should be induced to employ this power to inflict some signal punishment upon his person or his property; he therefore intreats him, with the strongest expressions of veneration, to depart from his vessel. Peter's idea of the danger of being near a prophet of the Lord, seems to have been the same with that of the widow of Zarephath, with whom the prophet Elijah resided, who, when she had lost her son, said to him, O thou man of God, art thou come to call my sins to remembrance; and to slay my son? 1 Kings, xvii. 18. It would be unjust to conclude, from the apostle's calling himself a sinful man, that he was now, or had been before, more wicked than other persons: it is rather a proof of his piety and humility; since the best characters are the most ready to acknowledge their imperfections.

9. For he was astonished, and all that were with him, at the draught of the fishes which they had taken.

10. And so was also James and John, the sons of Zebedee, which were partners with Simon; and Jesus said unto Simon, Fear not, from henceforth thou shalt catch men; *or*, "*catch men alive.*"

Christ makes use of this phrase, to point out the su-

Digitized by Google

periority of his future to his present employment: he now caught fish for their destruction; but he should hereafter catch men for their preservation.

11. And when they had brought their vessels to land, they forsook all and followed him.

They were so impressed with the extraordinary power of Christ, from seeing this miracle, that they concluded him to be some great prophet, and perhaps the Messiah: without staying, therefore, to dispose of the valuable prize which had been brought them, by selling the fish, they resolve to forsake all, and to follow him; not doubting that he who had procured such a draught of fishes, could provide for their support.

REFLECTIONS.

1. The miracles of Jesus, in curing an apprehended dæmoniac, an epileptic madman, and in the great draught of fishes, justly excited the admiration of the spectators: they were striking evidences of divine power, which could thus controul and alter the course of nature; yet many things, in the common course of Providence, not less wonderful, produce not in us the same admiration, and are hardly noticed. In the restoration of reason to a man who had been deprived of it, the Jews saw and acknowledged the hand of God; yet the gift of this faculty at first, and the continued exercise of it, although much more surprising, are viewed without emotion. We admire the power which could bring together so many fishes by a mere act of the will; yet we overlook that wonderful instinct, no less a proof of divine operation, which brings to our coast, at stated seasons, immense shoals of fish, for the

Digitized by Google

support and benefit of man. So true is it that men are struck with what is new and extraordinary, while they pay no attention to the wonders of nature, which are open to their view every day. Let us endeavour to guard against this inconsistency of behaviour, and, while we read with pleasure in the Bible, the history of miracles performed by God at different times, let us be equally ready to acknowledge and admire his power in the daily and familiar occurrences of life.

2. Let us remember that while we are hearing the discourses of Christ, we are listening to the word of God, and let us receive them with that attention and reverence which so high an authority deserves. He himself assures us, that he speaks what he heard of his Father, and that the words that he speaks are not his, but the Father's who sent him. These general expressions, indeed, are to be limited to what he speaks upon the subject of religion, and upon the objects of his divine mission: for in regard to other topics, there was no occasion for extraordinary divine illuminations; the common reason of mankind being sufficient for their direction in the common affairs of life; nor does it appear that Jesus was possessed of any such illumination. While he spoke to his hearers the word of God, well might the people press in such crowds to hear him, and justly might Peter and his companions forsake all to follow him. Let the zeal of these men never reproach our indifference. Let us eagerly inquire after what he has said, and bow to his authority in all things.

3. In the distress which Peter discovers at the apprehension of being punished for his sins, we may learn the value of the assurances which revelation gives of pardon to the penitent. Those who are conscious of guilt and expect punishment are in danger of perpetual alarms. A thousand circumstances will occur to awaken apprehensions in their breasts, and to fill them with the greatest distress, which, to other persons, appear to afford no foundation for fear. Peter, in an agony of fear, falls down at the feet of Jesus, and intreats him, with the utmost earnestness, to depart from

Digitized by Google

him, and hereby to save him from those evils which he knew that he had but too justly merited. In this he represents to us the sufferings of other sinful men in innumerable other instances. Let us be thankful to God for informing us that he is merciful, and for affording us so many examples of forgiveness.

4. Let us learn to admire the force of truth and the influence of divine power, in making the gospel triumph over all opposition, when it was taught only by fishermen.

Luke v. 12—15.	corresponds with	Matt. viii. 2— 4.
— 17——	- - - - -	ix. 2—17.
vi. 1—11.	- - - - -	xii. 1—15.
— 13—16.	- - - - -	x. 1— 4.
— 17—19.	- - - - -	iv. 23—25. v. 1.
— 20—26.	- - - - -	v. 2—12.
— 27—36.	- - - - -	v. 38.
— 39.	- - - - -	xv. 14.
— 40.	- - - - -	x. 24.
— 41, 42.	- - - - -	vii. 3— 5.
— 43—.	- - - - -	— 16—49.
vii. 1—10.	- - - - -	viii. 5—13.

Luke vii. 11—17.

11. And it came to pass the day after, that he went into a city called Nain, and many of his disciples were with him, *i. e. many of his stated followers*, and much people.

12. Now when he came nigh to the gate of the city, behold there was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother; and she was a widow; and much people of the city was with her.

Digitized by Google

It was usual with the Jews to bury their dead without the walls of their cities, which was a much more prudent method of disposing of them than what is adopted among Christians, who deposit the bodies of the dead in their towns, and even their places of public worship, where there is reason to fear that they may often prove injurious to the living. In the circumstances of this woman there was much to excite compassion: she was a widow, and in the death of her husband had lost her best protector and friend; to this calamity had just been added another equally severe, the loss of her only son, who, by his attention and kindness, might, in time, have supplied his father's place; so that after enjoying a very fair prospect, she was now left alone and friendless. These circumstances excited the compassion of her acquaintance, and induced a greater number of them than usual to attend the funeral; but they affected the feeling mind of Jesus in a still higher degree: for they led him to perform a miracle to remove her distress, without being solicited; which was contrary to his usual practice. In general, he thought it prudent to perform miracles only for those who asked and importuned him to exert his power for this purpose; lest, by choosing the object himself, he might excite a suspicion that some kind of imposture was practised, and that some were selected in preference to others, because they afforded a better opportunity for carrying on such a design. In the present instance he thought proper to depart from this rule, from motives of compassion to a poor widow, and because, although the object was chosen by himself, yet, the miracle being performed in a great crowd of people, whom he met accidentally, carrying a young man to the grave, there could be no ground for suspicion.

13. And when the Lord saw her he had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not.

As he was about to raise her son from the dead, he desires her to restrain her tears; since her mourning would so soon be turned into joy. This he knew would

Digitized by Google

be the case, as soon as she saw her son restored to life, which could only be an interval of a few moments; yet such was the compassion of Jesus, that he wished to prevent her sorrowing one moment longer than was necessary.

14. And he came and touched the bier: and they that bare him stood still; and he said, Young man, I say unto thee Arise.

15. And he that was dead sat up and began to speak:

His rising immediately at the command of Christ, and being so far recovered as to be able to speak, are plain proofs that his restoration to life was miraculous, and not accomplished by natural means, which must have operated gradually and slowly.

And he delivered him to his mother.

This he did from motives of humanity, to remove the distress with which he saw her afflicted, and that he might himself communicate to her the joy and extacy which he knew would arise in the breast of a parent, upon seeing an only son restored to life.

16. And there came a fear on all; and they glorified God, saying, That a great prophet is risen up among us, *rather*, "*has been raised up among us*;" and that God hath visited his people, *or*, *rather*, "*regarded his people*."

An awe of the Divine Being, who had on this occasion manifested his great power in so striking a manner, came upon the beholders, and they ascribed praise or glory to God, because he had kindly considered his people, in raising up a great prophet among them.—They justly denominate him a great prophet, because, without prostrating himself upon the dead body, or

Digitized by Google

praying over it, as other prophets had done, he by a single word, in a manner unexampled, raised the young man to life. It never occurred to these people, nor is there any foundation for the supposition, that Jesus Christ was God, or a super-angelic being in a human body.—All that they infer from this extraordinary miracle is, that Jesus was a great prophet, and they ascribe the praise of his extraordinary powers to the Divine Being, from whom, they supposed, he derived them.

17. And this rumour of him went forth throughout all Judæa, and throughout all the region round about.

This story of his having raised a dead man to life spread not only throughout Judæa, but throughout the countries which bordered upon it.

It may seem extraordinary, and by unbelievers it has been considered as an argument against the authenticity of this part of Luke's history, that an event so remarkable as that of raising this young man from the dead, should not be noticed by the evangelists Matthew and Mark. But our surprise will cease, if we consider that neither of them professes to give an account of every particular miracle which Jesus performed: on the contrary, it appears that they thought it sufficient to mention some of the miracles performed in any place, and passed over the rest in silence, or with a general account, without descending to particulars. Thus Matthew, in his eighth chapter, having set down the miraculous cures of a leper, of the centurion's servant, and of Peter's wife's mother, relates no more miracles particularly, but only says in general, "When the evening was come, they brought unto him many that were possessed with dæmons, and he cast out the spirits with his word, and healed all that were sick;" viii. 16. It is certain that Matthew knew of more instances of persons being raised from the dead, than the single one of Jairus's daughter, which is the only one which he has recorded: for he represents Christ as saying to the disciples of John, "Go and tell John, The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk; the dead are raised up." He says, *the dead* are raised up, in the plural number.

Digitized by Google

REFLECTIONS.

1. From the story which is here related, with so much simplicity, of Jesus' raising the widow's son from the dead, we may learn to admire and imitate the humanity of Christ. He is touched with compassion at the sufferings of a poor widow, who was bewailing the loss of an only son, and generously resolves to remove the cause of her distress, although he could have no prospect of deriving any other advantage from this action, than the satisfaction arising from the consciousness of having done good. Thus let us learn to relieve distress, and do good, where we hope for nothing again, by enlightening the ignorant, by comforting mourners, by procuring relief for the distressed, food and clothing for the poor, and by any other method which Providence may have put in our power. Nor let us always defer our assistance till we are asked for it. Acts of beneficence appear with double lustre in the eyes of God and man, when they are the voluntary offspring of the mind, and the natural dictate of the judgment and of the heart.

2. Let those who have lost valuable relatives by death, look forward with joy to the season of the general resurrection, of which the resurrection of this young man is but an imperfect image. Great was the surprise and joy of the spectators to see him, whom they were carrying to the grave, restored to life; but greater still was the joy of the mother, when she saw her son revive; when he that was lost was found; when he that was dead appeared alive again; yet this satisfaction was what she could not always hope to enjoy: the life which was now restored must be taken away; the mother must endure all the pangs of separation a second time, at her own death or that of her son: but not such

Digitized by Google

will be the resurrection of the just. The friends and relatives who then meet, will be able to welcome each other into a new existence, not short and full of trouble, like the present life; but one that will never end; where the pains of dying and the pangs of separation will be known no more. This will indeed be a happy meeting and a glorious day. When sorrowing, therefore, for those virtuous friends whom they have laid in the grave, let them recollect that they ought not to sorrow as those who are without hope. We may say to them, as Jesus said to this widow, who was so soon to enjoy the satisfaction of seeing her son again, Weep not. Weep not for friends whom you are so soon to see again; they are not dead, but sleep; they are gone to rest for a night only, and will awake again in the morning. Comfort yourselves, therefore, with these prospects.

3. The effect which this miracle had upon the immediate spectators, is such as it ought to have upon us. It should fill us with awe and reverence for the Supreme Being, who appears to be able thus to controul the powers of nature, who has kindly considered the wants of his creatures, and raised up for them a great prophet, proving his mission from heaven, by the most unquestionable and astonishing miracles.

Luke vii. 18—35. corresponds with Matt. xi. 2—11. 16—19.

Luke vii. 36. to the end.

36. And one of the Pharisees desired him that he would eat with him; and he went into the Pharisee's house, and sat down to meat.

This man, who seems to have been better inclined, and to have entertained a more favourable opinion of Jesus,

Digitized by Google

than most of his sect, wished to show him respect, by inviting him to his house: an invitation with which Christ, who would not decline any opportunity of doing good, complied.

37. And behold a woman in that city, which was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus was at meat in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster box of ointment;

38. And stood at his feet, behind him, and began to wash, *rather*, "*to wet*," his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment, *or*, "*perfume.*"

There are in these two verses several references to the customs of the ancients, which it is necessary to explain before they can be well understood. The method of sitting at meat among them was not like ours, in an erect posture, with the feet before them; but they laid themselves upon couches, on one side, with the feet extended; the left hand supported the head, and the other was used for taking food. This explains how the woman who stood behind could have access to the feet of Jesus: for she stood behind the couch, opposite to his feet. They wore nothing on their feet but sandals, which were taken off, and the feet washed, upon coming into a house; which shows us how this woman's tears could wet his feet, as well as explains what is said below, v. 44. In eastern countries, where the climate is very hot, perfumes are in frequent use; and it was usual at entertainments to distinguish such guests as they wished to show particular respect to, by anointing their heads with some kind of perfume. There is an allusion to this custom, Ps. xlv. 7, "God hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows." It was

Digitized by Google

with this design, probably, that this woman came upon the present occasion: but, being deeply affected with a sense of the guilt which she had contracted by her former course of life, which had been very immoral, she shed tears of sorrow at the remembrance of her sins. These tears falling upon the feet of Jesus, she wiped away with the hair of her head, kissed his feet, and anointed them with the perfume. These were all expressions of high respect and reverence. It was usual to anoint the head*, and lay hold on the feet with the hand, as tokens of respect; but she, who was not satisfied with ordinary marks of esteem, kissed his feet and anointed them. It is probable that having heard Jesus preach, she was awakened to a sense of her guilt by his discourses, and came now to express her gratitude for the happy change wrought in her mind. Who she was does not appear; for her name is not mentioned; but it has been generally supposed that she was Mary Magdalene: for no other reason that I can find, than that this woman is said to have been a great sinner, and Mary is said to have had seven devils cast out of her; as if being possessed with dæmons was an evidence of Mary's immoral character; whereas it signified no more than being afflicted with a dreadful disorder, and in the present instance with one so inveterate, as to be attributed to the possession of seven dæmons. Nor does it appear to what vices this penitent had been addicted, although it has also been supposed that she was a harlot. The transaction is said to have taken place in *the city*, whence it has been concluded that it was Capernaum, the place of Christ's ordinary residence, which is more than once mentioned in that general way, without specifying the name.

39. Now when the Pharisee which had bidden him saw it, he spake within himself, saying, This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and

* Mark xiv. 3. Matt. xxviii. 9. 2 Kings iv. 27.

Digitized by Google

what manner of woman this is that toucheth him: for she is a sinner.

The prophets mentioned in the Old Testament discovered that they knew what took place at a distance. Thus Elisha the prophet knew that Gehazi his servant went back to receive a present from Naaman the Syrian; and the same prophet discovered to the king of Israel what passed in the bed-chamber of the king of Syria.—From these, and other facts of a like nature, this Pharisee concluded, that if Jesus were a divine teacher, he would have known the past conduct of this woman; and that his ignorance upon this subject, which he discovered by permitting her to kiss his feet, and to show him other marks of respect, which Pharisees would not admit of from persons whose conduct had been notoriously infamous, was a plain proof of his being no prophet. In making this conclusion the Pharisee certainly went too far: for although the ancient prophets appear to have known in some instances what took place at a distance, there is no reason to believe that they had this knowledge in every case; but only where it was particularly communicated to them by God. Jesus might, therefore, have been ignorant of the conduct of this woman, and yet have had just pretensions to be a divine teacher.

40. And Jesus answering said unto him, Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee:

Jesus respectfully asks permission of Simon the Pharisee, whose guest he was, to say a few words, in answer to the objection which he had made in his own mind to his conduct; showing him that he knew what had passed in his thoughts, and must therefore, according to his own kind of reasoning, be a divine teacher.

And he saith, Master, say on.

41. There was a certain creditor which had two debtors; the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty;

Digitized by Google

42. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me, therefore, which of them will love him most?

43. Simon answered and said, I suppose that he to whom he forgave most; and he said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged.

By this parable Jesus intended to justify his conduct towards this woman, in permitting her to come into his presence, and to show him strong marks of her esteem. For if her penitence and gratitude from the hopes of forgiveness, which she had derived from his discourses, were as much more fervent than that of other persons, as her offences had been more heinous, she was as worthy of notice and favour as less transgressors, such as this Pharisee supposed himself to be. He therefore proceeds to show him how much more humble and grateful her conduct had been than his. He had neglected the common offices of civility, for fear, perhaps, of giving umbrage to the other Pharisees by these marks of attention: but she had given signs of gratitude which had never before been exhibited.

44. And he turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman? I entered into thy house; thou gavest me no water for my feet; but she hath washed, "*she hath bathed*," my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head.

Jesus well knew the cause whence her tears flowed; but he gave the matter a different turn, as if they were intended to supply a deficiency of civility in the master of the house, who had neglected to bring him water to wash his feet.

Digitized by Google

45. Thou gavest me no kiss; but this woman, since the time I came in, hath not ceased to kiss my feet.

To kiss the hand of a superior, as a token of reverence, was the common custom in the East, and continues there to this day. Even in our own country this ceremony is observed towards the prince. This mark of respect Simon had not paid to Jesus*.

46. Mine head with oil thou didst not anoint; but this woman hath anointed my feet with perfume.

To anoint the head and wash the feet are the first civilities paid to a guest in the East. Jesus takes notice of these omissions in the behaviour of Simon, not so much to reproach him for neglecting the customary civilities, as to show how much this woman had exceeded him.

47. Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven: for she loved much.

These words, as they stand in our translation, do not at all accord with our Lord's design in this place, which is evidently to show that her great love was the effect or consequence of having many sins forgiven, and not the cause or means of forgiveness, as this language represents it to be. Some have therefore proposed translating the words thus, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; therefore she loveth much. Others, with the slight transposition of a word, upon the authority of one manuscript, thus, Because her sins, which are many, are forgiven, she loved much; both which translations render the sense plain and consistent, and are better than that in our English Bible. Our Lord does not completely unfold his design to the Pharisee, but leaves him to draw the proper conclusion himself. The

* Harmer, vol. ii. p. 56, 57.

Digitized by Google

Pharisee had censured him, in his own thoughts, for suffering this woman to come near him; but Jesus had shown that if her offences had been great, her gratitude for the hope of forgiveness had been proportionately great; and that, therefore, she was a sincere penitent, which justified his conduct towards her.

But to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little.

48. And he said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven.

Jesus, knowing what passed in the mind of this woman, as he had before known what passed in the mind of the Pharisee, by those extraordinary gifts which he possessed, and perceiving that she was sincerely contrite for her offences, assures her that they are forgiven by God.

49. And they that sat at meat with him began to say within themselves, Who is this, that forgiveth sins also?

These Jews thought that it was God only, who knew the hearts of men, that was qualified to assure any one that his sins were forgiven; and not being aware that Jesus possessed this knowledge, they thought it presumption in him to use the language which he addressed to the woman. Lest she should be embarrassed with the doubts which the rest of the company expressed, by their looks if not by their words, of the authority of Jesus for what he said, he repeats his assurance, mentioning at the same time the means by which it had been procured, as an inducement to others to follow her example.

50. And he said to the woman, Thy faith hath saved thee: go in peace.

By believing Jesus to be sent from God, and attending to his instructions, she had been induced to repent of her sins, and was hereby saved from the punishment which, if unrepented of, they would have brought upon her.

Digitized by Google

REFLECTIONS.

1. Let us rejoice in the view here given us of the pardoning mercy of God. In exercising that attribute towards sinners, he is like a creditor, who, having two debtors that had nothing to pay, freely forgave them both: not, as some have represented him, like a creditor, who, when the debtor had nothing to pay himself, required others to pay for him, and will remit nothing of his demand, unless he receives an equivalent. That representation is as inconsistent with the language of Scripture, as it is with the nature of mercy. These Sacred Writings always speak of God as forgiving freely, when men repent of their sins, and sincerely desire it, without regard to any future consideration to be received, or any thing to be done by another: remitting a larger debt, as readily as a smaller; one of five hundred pence, as soon as one of fifty. The number or magnitude of men's sins makes no difference to him, if they are sincerely repented of. Let this consideration chear and encourage those whose minds are at present oppressed with a consciousness of the long continuance or enormity of their offences. Go to the God of mercy, and say to him, that you are truly sorry for what you have done; that henceforward you will cease to do evil, and learn to do well; and then, although your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; although they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.

2. Let those who have been forgiven much, remember that they ought to love much. In proportion as their past conduct has been irregular and disorderly, ought their sorrow to be deep and poignant, their humility unfeigned and their gratitude fervent, if they hope for forgiveness. This is nothing more than what God

Digitized by Google

may reasonably and justly expect. For the greater their guilt has been, the more reason have they to be grieved and ashamed for having contracted it; the more important the favour bestowed, the greater are their obligations to him from whom it comes. It is just and equitable in itself, and it is also necessary to their success in the work of reformation: for the farther they have gone in sin, the more difficult for them it will be to trace back their steps. The greater their crimes and the more inveterate their habits, the more difficult it is to abandon them. If, therefore, their sorrow for sin and their gratitude for the hope of forgiveness, be not more than ordinary, they will not be sufficient to accomplish their deliverance. A degree of penitence and contrition, which may reclaim men of less guilt, and induce them to persevere in a virtuous course, may be consistent with their ruin. Let those who have sinned much examine themselves by this rule; if their tears and their exertions are not in proportion to the heinousness of their past offences, they have reason for the greatest alarm.

3. The conduct of Jesus towards this penitent well deserves our notice, as displaying the excellence of his temper, and affording a good example for us to imitate. Instead of driving from his presence one whose conduct had been irregular, or rejecting with disdain the expressions of respect which she offered, as the proud and self-conceited Pharisee would have done, he permits her to approach him, and accepts of her attentions as marks of gratitude: instead of reproaching her for her faults, and terrifying her with threatenings of punishment, he endeavours to quiet those apprehensions which he perceived to be already awakened, kindly assures her that her sins, although many, are forgiven, and bids her go in peace, enjoying the comfort of these assurances.—Such was the humanity and tenderness of Jesus to an afflicted penitent, and so well did he fulfil the character given of him by the prophet; "A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench." Let us learn from his example not to shun the company of immoral persons, where they give signs of repentance

Digitized by Google

by reformation of conduct, and not to upbraid them harshly with their errors, lest we increase the anguish of a wounded spirit, and drive repentance to despair; thus extinguishing the spark of virtue, beginning to revive. But let us rather endeavour to quiet their fears and apprehensions, where it can be done upon good grounds, and give them every encouragement which kindness and tenderness can afford, to return to the path of virtue. It was thus that Jesus acted; and we cannot do better than imitate such a pattern.

Luke	viii. 4—15. corresponds with	Matt. xiii. 3—23.
	— 16, 17.	v. 13. x. 26.
	— 18.	xiii. 12.
	— 19—21.	xii. 46——.
	— 22—25.	viii. 23—27.
	— 26—40.	28——.
	— 41——.	ix. 18—26.
	ix. 1— 6.	x. 1—15.
	— 7— 9.	xiv. 1, 2.
	— 10—17.	13—21.
	— 18—21.	xvi. 13—20.
	— 22.	xvii. 22.
	— 23, 24.	x. 38, 39.
	— 25.	xvi. 26.
	— 26.	x. 33.
	— 27.	xvi. 28.
	— 28—36.	xvii. 1— 9.
	— 37—42.	14—18.
	— 44, 45.	22, 23.
	— 46—48.	xviii. 1— 5.

Luke ix. 49—56.

49. And John answered and said, Master, we saw one casting out dæmons in thy name; and we forbad him, because he followeth not with us.

Digitized by Google

It appears from Matt. xii. 26, 27. that the Jews, or rather the disciples of the Pharisees, professed to cast out dæmons; for Jesus says, in reply to their objections, "If I by Beelzebub cast out dæmons, by whom do your children," that is, disciples, "cast them out?" They undertook, it seems, in the name of the God of Abraham, to order dæmons to depart from persons who were thought to be possessed by them; although they did not succeed in their attempts: for Jesus is only arguing with them upon their own principles, and reproaching them with their inconsistency, in imputing his cure of dæmoniacs to Beelzebub, when they ascribed to God the pretended success of their own exorcisms. Some person, observing what extraordinary success Jesus had in curing dæmoniacs, and what power he seemed to possess over evil spirits, attempted to perform the like miracles, by using over those who were supposed to be possessed, the name of Jesus, or by ordering the dæmons to depart from them in his name. These pretences imposed upon some persons, who were induced to believe that they performed real cures by these means, and might deceive some of the apostles themselves. This account of this matter appears to me more probable than that which supposes that a real miracle was wrought here; since we find that a similar attempt, mentioned Acts xix. 13, where Jews, who had received no commission from Jesus or the apostles, adjure evil spirits to depart, in the name of Jesus whom Paul preached, appears to have utterly failed by the most incontrovertible evidence: for the lunatic was so far from being cured, that he leaped upon his exorcists, and overcame them; and they fled out of the house, naked and wounded; and it is not likely that the power of working a miracle, which was denied in the one case, would be granted in the other, which seems to have been exactly of the same kind: for this man had no authority from Jesus, nor any connection with his disciples. John, and some other of the apostles, seeing him perform what they thought real cures of dæmoniacs, by the name of their master, without any authority from him, became jealous for his and their own honour; because what had hitherto been peculiar to

Digitized by Google

themselves appeared to be now possessed by a stranger, and therefore they forbad him from doing so any longer; but having just heard Jesus commending those who received the meanest person coming in his name, John is led to ask him, whether he had done right in delivering this prohibition. Jesus, without enquiring into the circumstances of the case, and supposing that there might be a real miracle performed, as John had imagined, tells him that he was wrong in what he had done: for that the person who performed a miracle in his name must have no small respect for him, and could not easily be induced to speak against him.

50. And Jesus said unto him, Forbid him not: for he that is not against us is for us.

That is, if it be a just maxim that he who does not oppose another is a friend to his cause, much more reason have we to regard this man in that favourable light, who tends to spread the fame of my name by using it in this way. This proverb is the reverse of that which he delivers upon another occasion, Matt. xii. 30. He that is not with me is against me. But it is to be remembered that they are both proverbial sayings, and may be both just in different circumstances. Thus we have, in the Proverbs of Solomon, in one place, Answer *not* a fool according to his folly; which is reversed in another; Answer a fool according to his folly.

The principal difficulty attending the common interpretation of these two passages is that it supposes a man to work a miracle, who did not receive his gift of miracles from Jesus Christ or his apostles; a thing which is very unlikely in itself, and of which we have no other example in the New Testament.

51. And it came to pass, when the time was come that he should be received up, *or*, "*when the time of his withdrawing himself was completed*," he steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem;

Digitized by Google

The evangelist has been supposed to refer in this verse to the ascension of Christ into heaven, which was now speedily to take place, according to divine prophecy and appointment; and to say that therefore he returned to Jerusalem, where he was previously to suffer death; but his language agrees better with the idea that the days of Christ's retirement being ended, he determined to go to Jerusalem; to understand which it is necessary to observe, that the evangelist John tells us, vii. 1. That he walked in Galilee: for he would not walk in Jewry, because the Jews sought to kill him. He retired to that country, lest the Jews should lay hold on him, before he had accomplished the purposes of his ministry, by giving sufficient evidence of his divine mission, and fulfilling the prophecies which related to him. This end being now answered, he resolved to return to Judæa, and even to go up to Jerusalem, notwithstanding that he very well knew what the consequence of his appearing there would be. Steadfastly to set the face to go to Jerusalem, is a Hebrew phrase for being firmly resolved to go there, and implies both deliberation and danger. Had there been no danger, a steadfast purpose would not have been wanted.

52. **And sent messengers before his face; and they went and entered into a village of the Samaritans, to make ready for him.**

There was much enmity between the Jews and Samaritans, in consequence of a difference of opinion about the place of worshipping God; the Samaritans saying that it was mount Gerizim, but the Jews insisting that it was the temple at Jerusalem. As Jesus was now going up to Jerusalem, for the purpose of worshipping God, and his road thither lay through Samaria, he was apprehensive that if they knew the object of his journey, they might refuse him accommodations, and therefore sent two of his disciples before him, to try their temper, and to secure lodgings and other necessaries for himself and his followers; and it appears that his apprehensions were but too well founded.

Digitized by Google

53. And they did not receive him, because his face was as though he would go to Jerusalem.

The face is here put for the intention, which is manifested by the face; and the meaning is, that the Samaritans refused to receive him, because they saw that it was his intention to go up to Jerusalem. Josephus, the Jewish historian, relates a quarrel that took place between the Jews and the Samaritans, when the former were going up through their country, to keep the feast of the passover at Jerusalem. At such times the Samaritans were peculiarly inhospitable, because they believed the temple on mount Gerizim, and not that at Jerusalem, to be the proper place for worshipping God. As they knew that Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, to keep one of the Jewish feasts, they treated him as they would have treated the rest of his countrymen, by refusing him the accommodations of travellers.

54. And when his disciples James and John saw this, they said, Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, even as Elias did?

These two disciples were so exasperated at the unprovoked affront thus offered to their master, that they proposed doing what Elijah had done to Samaritans before, when he called down fire from heaven, to consume a captain and fifty men, whom Ahaziah, king of Israel in Samaria, sent to apprehend him*: but Jesus immediately expressed, in the strongest manner, his disapprobation of the proud and revengeful spirit which they discovered.

55. But he turned and rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of.

* 2 Kings i. 10.

Digitized by Google

You are not aware what a bad disposition you discover, by wishing to take away the lives of men for a trifling affront; how much pride, resentment and cruelty you betray. Some, however, have supposed that by this language Christ meant to say, Ye know not what spirit ye are of by your profession, when ye are followers of me; alluding to the mild and benevolent spirit of Christianity; an interpretation which seems to derive some countenance from the words which follow, in which he describes the design of his coming into the world. But in what ever way they are understood, the sense will be nearly the same.

56. For the son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them.

To preserve their lives, by healing the diseases of their bodies; and to keep them from final punishment, by curing the disorders of their minds.

And they went to another village.

REFLECTIONS.

These few verses illustrate the excellence of the character of Jesus, and the imperfection of that of his disciples: they show that he possessed true magnanimity, undaunted courage and exalted humanity.

1. We see that his mind was untinctured with any portion of envy. When his disciples saw, or imagined that they saw, a miracle performed by another man, who had received no commission from Jesus, and maintained no connection with them, they became immediately alarmed for their own reputation and that of their master, lest it should suffer by the growing fame of a rival; they therefore forbid him to perform any more. But Christ condemns their conduct, and endeavours to persuade them that this stranger was in reality a friend

Digitized by Google

to their cause, although not associated with them; hereby showing that he did not wish to confine the reputation of working miracles to himself, and that he was more concerned about the interests of truth and the success of his mission, than about his own personal aggrandizement. This discovered true greatness of mind. Moses also possessed the same spirit: for when Eldad and Medad continued prophecying in the camp, and some, who were jealous of his reputation, to whom the privilege of speaking in the name of God had hitherto been confined, desired him to forbid them, he made that noble answer; Would to God that all the Lord's people were prophets! The apostle Paul also showed a like spirit: for he rejoiced that Christ was preached, although some did it through envy and strife, in opposition to himself, and in order to add affliction to his bonds.—But the ministers of Christ have not always discovered the like magnanimity. They have too often regarded all those who have aspired to the same honour, as their enemies and rivals, although engaged in one common cause, which needed the services of all its friends; and have filled the world with their contentions about preeminence and power. Such conduct derives no countenance from the example of these most excellent characters.

2. We have here a striking instance of the undaunted courage of our master in doing the will of God. He forms a steady resolution of going up to Jerusalem, where his most inveterate enemies resided, who had lately threatened to kill him, and where he knew he should be put to death by them by the most cruel tortures: so strong was his desire to fulfil the will of heaven, and to promote the welfare of mankind, that he makes a voluntary sacrifice of his life for accomplishing these ends. Let us learn to imitate so noble an instance of self-denial.

3. We see, on this occasion, the exalted humanity of Christ's temper. He turns round, to express, by his gestures as well as his words, his indignation at the proposal of his disciples, to call down fire from heaven to

Digitized by Google

destroy men's lives. The people upon whom they wished to inflict this punishment were not members of the commonwealth of Israel, and had fallen into gross and hurtful errors on important subjects, by mistaking the place where God was to be worshipped, and by mixing with his service many idolatrous rites. They were animated with an inveterate rancour against the Jews, who were the true worshippers of God, and under the influence of this evil spirit they had refused the necessaries of life to travellers on their journey, because they were going up to Jerusalem. To wish for exemplary vengeance on such men might be regarded as a proof of zeal for true religion, and of affection to a Master who had received an unprovoked affront; and in these lights no doubt these disciples considered it. But Jesus saw that they were actuated by a different temper; by pride, which would not allow them to brook an affront, and by a desire of revenge for a supposed injury, which they were willing to retaliate at the expence of men's lives.

These two disciples, in their desire to exterminate the Samaritans, have had, alas, but too many imitators, in every age of the Christian church; particularly in those who have endeavoured to punish men for renouncing or opposing what they apprehended to be the truth, and who have imprisoned or tortured their persons and confiscated their property, for this purpose. We have a glaring example of the like misguided and pernicious zeal, in that memorable instance of human folly and depravity, the attempt of the christian world to punish the infidelity of Mahometans, and to exterminate them from the Holy Land. And it is well if there be not examples of a like spirit prevailing in more modern times. Let us, my brethren, while we hold such a spirit in abhorrence, be careful that we do not countenance it, either by our words or actions. The spirit of christianity is a spirit of gentleness, meekness, benevolence and mercy; of forgiveness and patience under injuries. The only lawful methods by which it is to be propagated or defended are reason, scripture and argument; if these fail, we must leave to God his own cause, and not presume to defend it by weapons which he has not authorized us to use.

Digitized by Google

Luke ix. 57—60, corresponds with Matt. viii. 19—22.

Luke x. 1—20.

1. After these things the Lord appointed other seventy also, *or*, *rather*, "*seventy others*," and sent them two and two before his face, into every city and place, whither he himself would come, *or*, "*was about to come.*"

These words refer not to any seventy which had been sent out before, but to the twelve apostles, who had been before sent out to preach, as mentioned in the last chapter, verses 1, 2. Christ fixed upon the number of twelve apostles, in allusion to the number of the tribes of Israel, which were twelve; and upon seventy disciples, to go before him to announce his approach, in reference to the seventy elders, whom Moses, by the direction of God, chose to assist him in the affairs of the nation of Israel; of whose institution you have an account, Numbers xi. 16. As they were sent only to places where Jesus was about to come, it appears that the design of their mission was to prepare the minds of men for his reception. Although journeying towards Jerusalem at this time, he travelled slowly towards that place, and preached every where as he went. The reason of sending two of these disciples together, was not so much for mutual assistance, as to give greater weight to their united testimony, than could have been obtained for that of a single individual.

2. Therefore said he unto them, The harvest truly is great, but the labourers are few. Pray ye therefore the

Digitized by Google

lord of the harvest, that he would send forth labourers into his harvest.

The directions which follow are nearly the same with those which he gave to the twelve apostles, of which you have an account in the tenth chapter of Matthew; except that they are delivered there a little more at large.

3. Go your ways; Behold I send you forth as lambs among wolves.

4. Carry neither purse nor scrip nor shoes, *i. e. none but what you have on*; and salute no man by the way;

That is, Employ the greatest dispatch: for eastern salutations, we are told, are very tedious, being accompanied with many inquiries and compliments.

As these disciples had many places to visit, and but a short time for the purpose, Jesus continually following them, such ceremonies must be omitted, since they would occasion much delay.

5. And into whatsoever house ye enter, first say, Peace be to this house.

This was the usual form of salutation, in entering a house in the east, and is still retained. By the term peace, they understand not merely tranquillity, but likewise all good things.

6. And if the son of peace be there, your peace shall rest upon it, *rather*, "*upon him*," *i. e. the son of peace:* if not, it shall return to you again.

It was usual with the Jews to call a person who possessed any good or bad quality, the son or child of that quality; thus wise persons are called the children of wisdom. Agreeably to this method of speaking, a person worthy of the wish of peace, is called the son of

Digitized by Google

peace; and Christ declares, that the blessings included in that wish shall descend upon him, or, if he were not what he was supposed to be, the wish should, notwithstanding, not be lost: for that it should be fulfilled in the person who uttered it.

7. And in the same house remain, eating and drinking such things as they give: for the labourer is worthy of his hire.

Christ advises his disciples to accept, without fear of doing wrong, such food as the hospitality of the person with whom they resided might provide for them: for if they laid aside the common employments of life, and devoted their time to the instruction of others in religious matters, they had a just claim upon them for support; agreeably to a common maxim, that the labourer is worthy of his hire. It was upon this principle also, that Jesus prohibited his disciples from providing any extraordinary clothing for their journey: for he would have them depend upon those who enjoyed the benefit of their labours, for such supplies.

Go not from house to house.

Christ prohibits this, because it would have the appearance of their being dissatisfied with the entertainment provided for them, and give occasion to suspicions, that they were actuated by other motives than the desire of communicating important truth. The advice in the next verse is founded upon the same principle.

8. And into whatsoever city ye enter, and they receive you, eat such things as are set before you;

9. And heal the sick that are therein, and say unto them, The kingdom of God is come nigh unto you.

That is, Learn from these miraculous cures, and our

Digitized by Google

preaching, that the Christian dispensation has approached.

10. But into whatsoever city ye enter, and they receive you not, go your ways out into the streets of the same, and say,

11. Even the dust of your city, which cleaveth on us, we do wipe off against you.

When men refused to receive them into their houses, or to afford them necessaries, they are ordered to declare publicly, by a symbolical action, by shaking the dust from their feet, that they would maintain no kind of intercourse with such wicked people. This Paul did at Antioch in Pisidia, Acts xiii. 51.

Notwithstanding, be ye sure of this, that the kingdom of God is come nigh unto you.

Remember, although you have rejected us, and we shall have no further communication with you, that the gospel has been brought to you, and that you must expect the dreadful doom which awaits those who have refused to receive it.

12. But I say unto you, that it shall be more tolerable in that day, *a day of judgment*, for Sodom than for that city.

The day here referred to is the season of temporal punishment, and not, as is generally supposed, final retribution; and Christ declares, that the calamities which should fall upon the towns and cities of Judæa, at the destruction of Jerusalem, would be more terrible than those which befel Sodom.

13. Woe unto thee; "*alas for thee*," Chorazin! alas for thee, Bethsaida! for if

Digitized by Google

the mighty works had been done in Tyre and Sidon, which have been done in you, they had a great while ago repented, sitting in sackcloth and ashes.

14. But it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon, at the judgment, than for you.

15. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted to heaven, shalt be thrust down to hell.

These three last verses have occurred already in Matthew, xi. 21, and were there explained.

16. He that heareth you heareth me; and he that despiseth you despiseth me; and he that despiseth me despiseth him that sent me.

To encourage the disciples to enter upon the difficult work about which he now sent them, he assures them that he should consider the kindness shown to them as shown to himself; and, on the other hand, that he should regard those who rejected them as rejecting himself, and as rejecting likewise that God by whose authority he came.

17. And the seventy returned again with joy, saying, Lord, "*Master*," even the dæmons are subject unto us through thy name.

That is, disorders attributed to dæmons. Jesus had not told these seventy disciples, as he had told the apostles, when he sent them forth, that they should be able to cure dæmoniacs: they were surprized, therefore, to find their miraculous powers extend to a case beyond their expectations, by perceiving that when they or-

Digitized by Google

dered dæmons to depart from persons, in the name of Christ, they appeared to obey their command; since the persons supposed to be possessed by them were cured.

18. And he said unto them, I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven.

The word Satan signifies an adversary or enemy, and is applied here by Christ to an allegorical personage, the supposed author of all evil, natural and moral. Before the appearance of Christ this personage reigned in the world without controul, causing many wicked practices and much misery; but his dominion was now about to be overthrown by the gospel, and Christ declares that he saw that his authority was soon to fall, as rapidly as the lightning descends from the skies. What particularly induced him to make this observation at this time was his finding that so many of his disciples as these seventy were enabled to work all kinds of miracles, even those which were deemed most difficult, the expulsion of dæmons, or the cure of disorders attributed to them. Hence he justly inferred the speedy overthrow of all opposition to his gospel. To be exalted to heaven, is to be raised to dominion and pre-eminence: to fall from it, therefore, must signify degradation and abasement.

19. Behold I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy.

This is figurative language, in which Christ, by telling his disciples that they shall trample upon venomous creatures, assures them that they shall overcome their most dangerous and malignant enemies.

And nothing shall by any means hurt you.

20. Notwithstanding, in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you;

Digitized by Google

but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven.

Rejoice not so much at your being able to work miracles, although of the most extraordinary and difficult kind, as that you are numbered amongst those for whom eternal life is prepared in heaven; which is a much more important privilege. Christ could not mean to assure these seventy disciples that they should all possess eternal life; but he is supposed to allude to the custom of enrolling the names of those who claimed the rights of citizens in a community, and to remind his disciples of the reason which they had to rejoice, in having their names inscribed in the records which God kept of those who had a title to being citizens of heaven, and who would actually possess it, if their title was not forfeited by their own folly.

REFLECTIONS.

1. In the mission of the seventy disciples, we see what care Christ took to excite attention to his divine mission, and to the purposes for which he came, by thus sending two of his disciples to every town and village, to preach and to work miracles; to inform the Jews that the kingdom of heaven was about to come to them, and would be more completely unfolded by the arrival of their master. In this he acted agreeably to the benevolence of his own temper, which made him wish to communicate the blessings of the gospel to all men, and inclined him to spare no pains that might be necessary for that purpose; agreeably likewise to the will of his heavenly Father, who willed that all men should be saved, and that those who rejected his offers should be left without excuse. After the example of Christ, let us endeavour to communicate the knowledge of this gospel to all men; to the poor as well as to the

Digitized by Google

rich; to strangers as well as friends; and let us be ready to adopt every expedient that may enable us to accomplish this purpose. We cannot confer a greater benefit.

2. In the directions which Jesus gives to these disciples, there is something to be learned by those who teach and by those who are instructed in the gospel.—The former may learn that they ought not to be fastidious about their own accommodations, while they are employed in that important work. Especially, let them not discover a fondness for the luxuries and delicacies of the table, which may give those whom they teach reason to suspect that they are more concerned about the gratification of their own appetites than the propagation of the truth; but learn to be content with plain food and a moderate provision for their subsistence. On the other hand, let those who are taught remember that while their instructors manifest these moderate views, they ought not to refuse them a maintenance; they claim it not as a favor or indulgence, but as a right; they are entitled to it upon the same principle of equity as a labourer is entitled to his hire; as that upon which those who call for the time and services of another are bound to provide for his support. This is a maxim of common life, the justice of which every one acknowledges. Let those who are taught, then, communicate to those who teach; and while they partake of their spiritual good things, let them allow them a share of their temporals.

3. Let us remember that we, in the present day, are in circumstances nearly resembling those of the first preachers of the gospel. By the corruptions which it has undergone since its first appearance, it has been as much defaced and injured as the religion of the Jews in the time of our Saviour, and stands as much in need of reformation. The great mass of christians have very mistaken notions of the object of divine worship, and of the methods of acceptance with God; two very essential points of religion. But in attempting to communicate to the world juster notions upon these subjects,

Digitized by Google

and to produce a change, there is much to discourage: there is much work indeed to do, and but few to engage in it, in proportion to its magnitude. Let us, however, attend to the exhortation of Christ, and pray the master of the harvest to send forth more labourers into his harvest; the work is in his hands, and he can accomplish it whenever he pleases. Yet let us not content ourselves with our prayers, however earnest; but let every one put in his sickle, and undertake some part of the work himself, as God may have given him ability.

Luke x. 25. to the end.

25. And behold a certain lawyer, "*a teacher of the law*," stood up, and tempted him, "*tried him*," saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?

This teacher of the law, as well as the other Pharisees, believed the doctrine of a resurrection from the dead to a future life, upon the authority of tradition, although it was not taught in the law of Moses; and hearing Christ teaching it publicly and openly, he wished to know whether he prescribed any different course of conduct for attaining this life than what the law of Moses prescribed to men; that if this appeared by his answer, he might have something whereof to accuse him to the people, as teaching what was contrary to the law. Jesus replies by referring him to the law of Moses; intimating hereby, that what was necessary to obtain future happiness, was the same as was necessary to the right observance of the law.

26. He said unto him, What is written in the law? How readest thou?

Digitized by Google

27. And he, answering, said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself.

The first of these precepts you find in Deuteronomy, vi. 5. It enjoins the supreme love of God, in a variety of phrases, not to express different ideas, but to convey the same thing more strongly. The second precept, relating to the love of our neighbour, does not immediately follow the first, but is found in a different place; Lev. xix. 18.

28. And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right; this do, and thou shalt live.

Thou shalt possess eternal life: for whoever loves God and his neighbour, in the manner prescribed in these precepts, cannot fail to perform every other duty which he owes to each.

29. But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour?

He proposed this question, in order to vindicate himself from the imputation of not understanding the law which he professed to teach; for he had something to offer upon the question, who is my neighbour? which would prove his skill in expounding the law. The observation which he intended to make was probably this, which corresponded with the language of the Pharisees upon this subject, that no one was a neighbour but a native Israelite. The answer of Jesus, therefore, is directed to remove this prejudice, by showing that strangers, and persons of different religious opinions from ourselves, are intitled to our assistance, when in distress, no less than persons of the same country, and of the

Digitized by Google

same religious sect. This sentiment he endeavours to inculcate by a beautiful parable; an ancient and inoffensive method of conveying instruction.

30. And Jesus, answering, said; A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho;

Some better render this clause, by admitting that the evangelist has made a slight transposition of words, A certain man of Jerusalem went down to Jericho: for the story requires that this man should be a Jew, which does not at all appear from the common translation: for a stranger might go down from Jerusalem to Jericho.

And fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half-dead.

The scene of this parable is very properly laid in the road from Jerusalem to Jericho: for the country was mountainous, and adapted to the purposes of robbers. Dr. Shaw tells us that one of the passes is still called the mountain of blood, or the bloody road; probably, from the murders committed there. While the traveller lay in this wretched condition, two persons passed by, from whose compassion he might have expected relief, but who did not afford him any.

31. And by chance there came down a certain priest that way; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side, "*on the further side.*"

32. And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came, and looked on him, and passed by on the other side.

Digitized by Google

A priest and a Levite were persons who taught the law to others, and could not but know that it enjoined compassion; nor had they, in this instance, any of those excuses to offer for their inhumanity which they might be disposed to plead: for the person who called for their assistance was not a Samaritan or a Gentile, but an Israelite and a brother; in the most wretched condition to which a human being could be reduced; yet they passed by him without pity, or without feeling so much compassion as was sufficient to induce them to take the trouble of giving him assistance. But mercy is sometimes found where we had least reason to expect it, and appears to be wanting where we seemed authorized to look for it. Those tender offices of humanity are performed by a stranger, which were denied by a priest and a Levite.

33. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was; and when he saw him, he had compassion on him,

The person before him was a Jew, a man of a foreign nation and of a different religion from his own, whom he had been taught to regard with the deepest hatred from his infancy, and who would perhaps have been little disposed to give him relief in like circumstances. Powerful arguments these for disregarding him! Yet when he saw his distress; when he perceived a fellow-creature naked and wounded, and dying upon the public road, his humanity overcame them all: he was deeply affected with his condition.

34. And went to him, and bound up his wounds, *tearing his own clothes for the purpose*, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast,

Oil and wine have great virtue in healing wounds, and were part of the provisions which travellers carried with them on their journey. He chose to submit to the inconvenience of walking himself, in order that he might accommodate this distressed stranger.

Digitized by Google

And brought him to an inn, and took care of him.

35. And on the morrow, when he departed, he took out two pence*, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him, and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee.

Being obliged to leave him the next day, he endeavours to secure him attention when he is gone, by giving the host as much money as he could then spare, to provide necessaries; and, as he was apprehensive this might not be sufficient, by binding himself to repay whatever more might be expended. Without entering into this engagement, he was afraid that the mercenary disposition of the host might lead him to refuse what was wanted. Jesus, having finished the parable, turns to the expounder of the law, and asks him, which of the three, he thought, had acted the part of a neighbour.

36. Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves?

37. And he said, He that showed mercy on him.

The case is so plain that he is compelled, in opposition to his own opinions and most inveterate prejudices, to acknowledge that the character of neighbour belonged to the Samaritan.

Then Jesus said unto him, Go and do thou likewise.

This teacher of the law thought that no one was to be considered as a neighbour, who was not of the same country, and did not profess the same religion, with himself. But Jesus, by exhorting him to imitate the con-

* See note on Matt. xx. 2.

Digitized by Google

duct of the good Samaritan, who had shown compassion to a Jew in distress, directs him to regard every man as his neighbour who stands in need of his assistance, and to afford him all the kind services in his power, however separated from him by country or religious opinions.

38. Now it came to pass, as they went, that he entered into a certain village, and a certain woman, named Martha, received him into her house.

This village was Bethany, about two miles from Jerusalem, and the place where Jesus afterward raised from the dead Lazarus, the brother of Martha and Mary. As they made an entertainment for Jesus and his disciples, it is probable that they were persons of some property. Luke has inserted the story in this place, although it did not happen till afterwards: for we find him speaking of the arrival of Jesus at Bethany, xix. 29.

39. And she had a sister called Mary, which also sat at Jesus' feet, and heard his word.

Jesus took every opportunity of communicating his doctrine, when persons were disposed to hear him; and Mary was glad of an occasion of placing herself in the position of a disciple to attend to his words: for sitting at the feet was the usual posture of disciples, when listening to the instructions of a teacher; as we find from what Paul says, Acts xxiii. 3, that he was brought up at the feet of Gamaliel. But Martha, being anxious to testify her respect for Jesus, by providing a handsome entertainment for him, was displeased to find that the whole work was left to her, and therefore complains to Jesus of her sister's conduct, and desires him to direct her to give assistance.

40. But Martha was cumbered about much serving, and came to him and said, Lord, "*Master*," dost thou

Digitized by Google

not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? Bid her therefore that she help me.

But Jesus, instead of complying with Martha's request, gives her a gentle reproof for her anxiety to provide many things, when one was sufficient, and tells her that Mary had chosen a better employment, which should not be taken from her by him.

41. And Jesus answered, and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things; *that is, as the connection leads us to understand the words,* "*about many dishes.*"

42. But one thing is needful, *rather,* "*when only one is needful,*" *that is, one dish;* and Mary hath chosen that good part, *the good part of hearing me,* which shall not be taken from her.

This passage may serve to show how much they are liable to be misled, who, when a portion of scripture appears capable of two senses, choose to adopt that which seems most important and most honourable to the speaker or writer. Guided by this principle, commentators have been induced to suppose, that as to speak about one dish to be provided for an entertainment, appeared to be a matter not worth the attention of Jesus, he must refer to something of more consequence, and mean religion, or religious instruction, which is certainly needful, but by no means requires our sole or principal attention, as some have imagined, and have been hereby induced to spend all their time in retirement from the world. Our principal attention is to be given to that kind of honest labour or employment to which Providence has called us: for it is hereby that we shall render ourselves and others most happy.

Digitized by Google

REFLECTIONS.

1. Let us be careful to keep in mind the great duty of universal benevolence, inculcated upon us by this beautiful parable, by which you are not to understand that every man is entitled to an equal share in your beneficence, but that there are cases in which all men have a claim to your assistance. It is generally true, that men will do most good by attending to the wants of those who are near to them; because they are most within the reach of their assistance; and that by endeavouring to extend their efforts to those who are at a distance, they are likely to be lost. Upon this principle, it is our duty to attend to the wants of our own children and relatives, before the children and relatives of others; to the members of our own church or Christian society, before the members of another; and to our own countrymen before strangers: for it is evident that if every one acted upon the same principle, assistance would be given to all men, and more effectually than in any other way. Yet there are cases of human want or misery, where men can receive no assistance, except it be from strangers, or from none so effectually; as was the case with this Jew; and therefore it is the duty of every one to exert himself in acts of beneficence, according to the ability which God hath given him. The wants of mankind are as extensive as human nature; so extensive also let our charity be: wherever we meet with a fellow-creature in distress, there let us do like this Samaritan, and be particularly careful that we do not suffer religious bigotry or national prejudices to obstruct or restrain our beneficence.

There are two cases in which the inhabitants of this country are in danger of forgetting the maxim here recommended, and in which they ought, therefore, to be particularly attentive to their behaviour. The first is in

Digitized by Google

regard to those with whom we are at war. The enmity subsisting between us and them can hardly be greater than that which subsisted between the Jews and the Samaritans. The Jews regarded the Samaritans as apostates from the true faith, hated them as enemies and rivals, and refused all intercourse with them in private life; and, it may be presumed, that the Samaritans felt their passions inflamed against the Jews, from the like motives. Yet it was evidently the intention of this story to inculcate upon the Jews their obligation to show compassion to individuals of an hostile nation, when in distress; and, no doubt, the same obligation devolves upon us, if what is called the fortune of war should bring them into our power. In such cases, our religion, if rightly understood, instead of inflaming our passions and hardening our hearts against their distresses, will allay and soften our resentment into acts of humanity and tenderness: it will teach us, if our enemy hunger, to feed him; if he thirst, to give him drink.

The other case is not that of one nation, however numerous, but of a great number of nations, of a fourth part of the inhabitants of the globe, including many millions of human beings, yet removed to a great distance from us, and differing greatly from ourselves in colour, in language, in religion and in manners; and, what tends still more to render us insensible to their sufferings, a body of men, by whose calamities we are supposed to be enriched. That these causes have led us to overlook their sufferings is but too evident: for they have called to us for pity for many years, without being heard; and when at length our compassion was awakened for a moment, it was soon stifled. Let us not forget, however, that they are our brethren, the children of one common Father; that they are placed within the reach of our assistance, and that they have every claim to it, which can arise from the number of the sufferers, the greatness of their sufferings, and the long time they have been endured; and, in proportion to the difficulty of procuring redress, ought to be the vigour and patience of our exertions.

Digitized by Google

2. In the conduct of Jesus towards Mary and Martha, we see how much more concerned he was about the success of the work in which he was engaged, than about the indulgence of his own appetites. Although the civility of a friend was not unacceptable to him, yet to listen to his instructions was far more agreeable. Whatever pleasure he might derive from the gratification of the senses, to do good afforded him much more. Thus has he fulfilled the character which he gave of himself, that it was his meat and drink to do the will of his Father; and left us herein an excellent pattern to imitate.

Luke xi. 1—5. corresponds with Matt. vi. 9—13.

Luke xi. 5—10. 27, 28. 37—41.

5. And he said unto them, Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, *at the most unseasonable hour possible*, and say unto him, Friend, lend me three loaves:

6. For a friend of mine in his journey is come to me, and I have nothing to set before him;

It was a case of the greatest urgency, which demanded immediate assistance. The person to whom he applied, being of a churlish disposition, begins to make excuses for refusing to comply with his request.

7. And he from within shall answer, and say, Trouble me not; the door is now shut, and my children are with me

Digitized by Google

in bed, *i. e. are, as well as myself, in bed.* I cannot rise and give thee?

It would be troublesome to us both to get up from bed, to unbar the door and let thee in: therefore, pray excuse us. These were very insufficient reasons for refusing assistance in a case of such necessity. Some ancient versions of the New Testament insert, between the end of this verse and the beginning of the next, the following words, which seem necessary to complete the sense, and have, by some means or other, been lost; *and if he continue knocking:* for he is said to use importunity, which could not be said with propriety, if he asked only once.

8. I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend; yet because of his importunity he will rise, and give him as many as he needeth.

What he would not yield to the calls of friendship, or to relieve the wants of a traveller, he will grant to procure ease, to free himself from the urgent requests of one who will take no denial. In the next verse, Jesus informs his disciples what his intention was in delivering this parable.

9. And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you:

10. For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.

In order to understand the reason of introducing this parable, and to see to what cases it may be applied, it is necessary to observe that Jesus, in compliance with

Digitized by Google

the request of his disciples, who desired to be taught to pray, had just been delivering to them that form of prayer which is usually called the Lord's prayer; a prayer, which, although not unsuitable to any period of time, must be supposed to be peculiarly adapted to the circumstances of those for whose immediate use it was intended. One of the petitions in this prayer is, Thy kingdom come; by which the disciples were directed to pray for the establishment of that kingdom of truth and righteousness which the Messiah was sent to set up; and therefore for all those miraculous gifts which were necessary for this purpose, and which could be obtained only by prayer, at least in their utmost extent: for when the apostles failed in their attempt to cure a dæmoniac, and asked Jesus why they could not cast him out, he replied, This kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting; that is, the miraculous gifts necessary for casting him out can be obtained only by such earnest prayer as is accompanied with fasting. In refusing to bestow miraculous powers without prayer, there is nothing more extraordinary than in refusing to bestow them without faith, which, it is well known, was necessary for working miracles, and, in many cases, for being objects of those benefits which they produced.—To encourage his disciples to pray for the Holy Spirit, with that earnestness which was necessary for obtaining it, Jesus delivers to them a parable, in which he represents a man as obtaining that by earnest and repeated request, which would not have been granted to the justice or humanity of his plea; and intimates hereby, that if they asked with the like earnestness, their petitions would be accompanied with the like success. Not that he would have them regard God as like a churlish man, who may be forced by importunity to do what he does not approve, or that which is against his will; but that if a man of such a temper may by such means be induced to grant what he is averse to bestow, God, who is infinitely benevolent, and always disposed to do good, is much more likely to bestow what they ask for with earnestness. So that he reasons not from God's being like a churlish man, but from his being so much superior to him; and his argumentr esembles that used in the

Digitized by Google

parable of the widow and the unjust judge. That Christ's language upon this occasion relates to miraculous powers to be obtained by prayer, is evident from what he says at the conclusion of this subject, verse 13th; "If ye, then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him!" Christ, therefore, must here be considered not as giving assurances of success in their prayers to all Christians, in general, and with respect to every thing which they might ask for with importunity, but to the apostles only, and to them no further than respected miraculous powers.

Luke xi. 11—13. corresponds with Matt. vii. 8—11.
— 14—23. - - - - - - { ix. 32—34. xii. 22—30.
— 24—26. - - - - - - — 43—45.

---

27. And it came to pass, as he spake these things, a certain woman of the company lift up her voice, and said unto him, Blessed, *or*, "*happy*" is the womb that bare thee, and the paps which thou hast sucked.

Having observed the wisdom which Jesus discovered in confuting the cavils of the Pharisees, she expresses her admiration of it, in a manner suitable to her sex, by declaring her happy, who had given birth to so excellent a son. But Jesus, unwilling that the people should dwell on his own praise, which this woman intended to express, although indirectly, turns their thoughts to a different subject.

28. But he said, Yea, rather, happy are they that hear the word of God and keep it.

Digitized by Google

You have pronounced her happy who gave me birth; but I tell you that they are much more worthy to be so stiled, who hear the word of God as delivered by me, and are careful to observe it by obeying his precepts: for they will be rewarded with eternal life. Christ very properly joins keeping the word of God to hearing it: for one without the other would only add to their misery.

Luke xi. 29—32. corresponds with Matt. xii. 38—42.
— 33. - - - - - - - - - v. 15.
— 34—37, - - - - - - - - - vi. 22, 23.

---

37. And as he spake, *or*, "*after he had spoken*," a certain Pharisee besought him to dine with him; and he went in, and sat down to meat; *i. e. as if prepared to eat.*

38. And when the Pharisee saw it, he marvelled that he had not first washed before dinner.

The Pharisees never sat down to eat without first washing their hands, being afraid lest they might have been polluted by coming into contact with some unclean thing, and that if they touched their food with them, which was to be afterwards taken into the stomach, they might suffer double defilement. This Pharisee, therefore, who had invited Jesus to his table, was surprised to observe that he did not follow so pious an example. But our master, instead of countenancing a superstitious practice by his example, rebukes the Pharisee for placing religion in such useless ceremonies, and neglecting what was of infinitely greater moment, a right disposition of mind.

39. And the Lord said unto him,

Digitized by Google

Now do ye Pharisees make clean the outside of the cup and the platter, "*the dish*;" but your inward part is full of ravening, "*rapine*," and wickedness.

There seems to be here an intermixture of a comparison and the application of it: for the inside of the cup could not be full of rapine and wickedness, but it must be the inside of men that is so; yet the sense is obvious, that the Pharisees, in maintaining a fair outward appearance, while their minds were the seat of every vice, acted as foolishly as a man who should make clean the outside of a cup, but take no pains to make clean the inside.

40. Ye fools! Did not he that made that which is without, make that which is within also?

When literally rendered, "Doth not he who doeth the outside matter do the inside also? that is, Doth not he who cleaneth the outside usually clean the inside also? As in common life it would be thought very foolish and preposterous to clean the outside of a vessel, and leave the inside full of filthiness; so is it as strange, that ye should acquiesce in immoral impurities, under the cover of a specious outside demeanor to the world.

41. But rather give alms of such things as ye have, *or*, "*as ye are able*;" and behold all things are clean unto you.

Christ's meaning seems to be, that to wash the body, without purifying the mind, is of no use; but that when the mind is corrected by repentance and good works, and particularly by acts of mercy, there is nothing by which it can be defiled. Such a mind will always appear pure in the sight of God.

Digitized by Google

REFLECTIONS.

1. Christ, in the answer which he made to the woman who pronounced his mother happy in having such a son, has given us a good rule, by which to estimate human happiness; for he has told us, that it consists principally in hearing the word of God and in keeping it. Men are apt to value themselves for other things: for being descended from renowned ancestors; for having noble or royal blood in their veins; or for giving birth to eminent personages: they esteem themselves happy in possessing such advantages, and think themselves superior to the rest of mankind on that account. But such distinctions Christ pronounces of little value. They imply no personal merit. They may belong to the ignorant and vicious, as well as to the good; they afford no real benefit. Our true happiness consists in knowing our duty, and in practising it. In this there is something meritorious and honourable; it is a mark of true wisdom and of personal excellence; it is the means of peace and joy in the present world, and the way to everlasting felicity in the next. Let us learn to judge of others, and to form our own conduct, by this rule; to esteem men happy in proportion to their moral excellence: according as they discharge the duties of life with fidelity and diligence, or not; and to look with indifference or contempt upon every other distinction. Let us make it our own ambition, not to acquire fame or to be thought great, but to live well: for this is the only just foundation of true honour and happiness.

2. We may learn from the conduct of Christ upon this occasion, how we ought to act with regard to superstitious ceremonies. In favour of conformity to that here mentioned, it might be urged, That by washing his hands before meat, he would have pleased the Pha-

Digitized by Google

risee who had invited him to his house, and might, perhaps, have lessened the prejudices of the whole sect against his character and pretensions; that compliance in so trifling an instance could not possibly do any harm; whereas a refusal would expose him to the charge of obstinacy, or the suspicion of irreligion. But these were all motives of human policy, in the opinion of Christ; he knew that such practices were no where enjoined by the law of God, and that to inforce them upon men's consciences, as of religious obligation, was to weaken the authority of the law, by representing it as defective and insufficient; he therefore refused to conform to the custom of the Pharisees. Influenced by the example of Christ, and acting upon the principles by which he was governed, Protestants have rejected many of the ceremonies of the church of Rome; and in the same manner we, as Dissenters, have refused to comply with many rites which have been retained by Protestant churches; such as the use of the cross in baptism, kneeling at the Lord's supper, bowing at the name of Jesus, and turning the face to the east in particular parts of religious worship. These things have the appearance of piety and devotion in the opinion of many, and by others are thought but trifles, which it does not become wise men to oppose. But to these arguments for conformity, the example of Christ furnishes us with a ready answer: for he refused to conform to a custom of the Pharisees, in a case exactly similar.

3. Let us remember in what high estimation acts of mercy, or giving of alms, are held by Christ. He has declared that nothing can defile those who perform such actions; that is, not those who give alms to be seen of men, as was the case with the Pharisees, and whom he has elsewhere condemned; but those who do it from a principle of compassion to their brethren, and from a regard to the will of God. Men may observe ceremonies without number, and for as long a time as they please; they may also make long prayers, and pretend to great zeal for religion; yet, without the virtue from which such actions as these proceed, such prac-

Digitized by Google

tices are of no more use than making clean the outside of the cup, while the inside is full of all filthiness: but those who are possessed of it, whatever external forms they neglect, are pure in the sight of God. Ceremonies, in regard to them, have answered their purpose, and may be safely laid aside. Let us be careful then to cultivate a virtue which holds so high a rank in the Christian religion, and which is so necessary to the happiness of the human race; and remember, that in times when the distresses of our brethren are extraordinary, our endeavours to alleviate or remove them ought to be proportionally great.

Luke xi. 42.	corresponds with Matt.	xxiii. 23.
— 43.	- - - - -	6.
— 44.	- - - - -	27.
— 46.	- - - - -	4.
— 47—51.	- - - - -	29—35.
— 52.	- - - - -	13.
xii. 1.	- - - - -	xvi. 6.
— 2, 3.	- - - - -	x. 26, 27.
— 4—9.	- - - - -	28—33.
— 10.	- - - - -	xii. 31, 32.
— 11, 12.	- - - - -	x. 19, 20.

Luke xii. 13—21.

13. And one of the company, *or* "*multitude*," said unto him, Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me.

That he keep no more than what is justly due to him, and allow me an equitable share. It is probable hence, that it was usual with the Jews, in order to settle differences, and to prevent expensive litigations, to appoint arbitrators, of acknowledged wisdom and equity, to whose opinion causes were submitted. Some person of the multitude, who was led to entertain a high opinion

Digitized by Google

of Christ, from hearing his discourses, wished him to undertake this office between himself and his brother, whom he considered as claiming a larger share of the patrimony than what belonged to him. But Jesus declined the office, because he was not invested with authority for exercising it.

14. And he said unto him, Man, who made me a judge or a divider over you?

I have no authority for either of these offices, and will not therefore exercise them; lest ye should apply to me the same language which was applied to Moses, when he attempted to reconcile two Israelites that were at variance. See Exodus ii. 14, where the same words are used in the Greek translation as in this place. Jesus satisfied himself with giving general rules of equity; and left it to others to apply them to particular cases, without interfering in the affairs of individuals. It does not appear which of these brothers was in the wrong; yet, as one of them must have been to blame, and his ill conduct must have proceeded from too eager a desire to get wealth, Jesus proceeds to caution his disciples against that failing.

15. And he said unto them, Take heed and beware of covetousness, *rather*, "*of an inordinate love of money.*"

It is not a niggardly disposition, leading persons to deny themselves the common enjoyments of life, in order to become rich, which is what we usually understand by covetousness, against which our Lord here cautions his disciples; but that fondness for money which proceeds from a desire of gratifying the senses and indulging the appetites, as appears from what follows.

For a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.

Digitized by Google

That is, his great possessions will not secure the continuance of his life. That this is the sense of this passage appears from the parable which our Lord subjoins.

16. And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully.

His wealth increased not from rapine, injustice or oppression, nor from denying himself the common comforts of life, nor from his own laborious exertions; but in the most innocent way possible, by the bounty of Providence in making the earth more fertile than usual, and in giving him a most plentiful harvest, the produce of which he was at first at a loss how to dispose of.

17. And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits?

18. And he said, This will I do. I will pull down my barns, and build greater, and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods; *the extraordinary produce of the present year and all my former stores,*

He was at first afraid that he should not be able to preserve the plenty which the fertility of his fields had produced; but a little deliberation suggested to him a scheme for securing it, not only for the present, but likewise for many years to come; this was—enlarging his store houses.

19. And I will say to my soul, *to myself*, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years: take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry, *rather*, "*feast thyself.*"

Digitized by Google

Thou art amply furnished with the means of subsistence for many years: sit down now, and enjoy thyself freely, without fear of exhausting or of losing what thou hast acquired. This rich man valued wealth not for its own sake, as many do; but for the sake of the gratifications which it would afford him in eating and drinking and other delights. In this respect he showed himself wiser than those who hoard up wealth, for no other purpose than that of contemplating it, and have no heart to make use of it. But in counting upon many years of ease and enjoyment, he was guilty of great presumption and folly, as appears by the next verse.

20. But God said unto him, *not in words, but by his decree,* Thou fool, this night thy soul "*thy life*" shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?

Thou fool, thus to forget thy own mortality and thy dependence upon me, thy supreme Lord! Thou hast presumed upon many years of enjoyment of thy riches; but thou shalt be removed from them immediately.—Then to whom shall thy wealth belong? Certainly not to thee.

21. So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich towards God.

So great a fool is he who amasses riches on earth, and is not rich in acts of charity; which are called a treasure in the heavens, which faileth not, verse 33*.

This parable was very applicable to the occasion on which it was delivered. The man who had desired Jesus to speak to his brother, to divide the inheritance with him, was more anxious to obtain his assistance in securing what might indeed be due to him, but which was not necessary for the support of this frail life, than about directions how to obtain eternal life; which

* Matt. vi. 20. 1 Tim. vi. 18, 19.

Digitized by Google

showed a mind unreasonably attached to riches. The warning, therefore, contained in the parable was particularly suitable to his case.

REFLECTIONS.

1. The conduct of Christ, in declining to undertake the office of a Judge, to settle a difference between brethren, shows his prudence and his moderation: his prudence, inasmuch as, however he might have decided the question in dispute, he must have offended one, if not both, of the parties, and hereby have prejudiced their minds against the admission of that important doctrine which it was the great business of his life to recommend. To have devoted his time to any other purpose, must have interrupted him in executing this; which was of much more consequence to the human race. His moderation was manifested in refusing an honourable post, which must have exalted him in the opinion of others, when he might thereby injure the design of his mission. Let the ministers of religion, in the present day, copy this part of their master's conduct; and learn to decline honours, the acceptance of which might prove injurious to the cause in which they are engaged.

2. Let us be careful to avoid the character, if we wish to escape the doom, of this rich man. The character which he exhibits and the fatal issue in which it terminates, are not unusual in the world. We see men amassing riches with great anxiety and labour, and when they have succeeded in their pursuit, pleasing themselves with the prospect of spending them in sumptuous living, in every thing that can please the eye, gratify the taste or flatter pride, without thinking of the claims which God or their fellow-creatures may have upon them. We even find them taking no small merit to themselves from such a plan of life; because

Digitized by Google

they have a heart to enjoy what they have acquired, and do not imitate the folly of those who hoard up wealth without any design of using it, whom they call mean-spirited and narrow-minded men. Yet their own folly is scarcely less reprehensible than that which they despise and ridicule: for they build their happiness upon the sand. While they are pleasing themselves with the hope of many years of voluptuous enjoyment, God, whom they had not taken into their account, suddenly cuts short their lives, and they are obliged to leave to strangers what they had designed for their own use. From such examples, and from this parable, which was intended to remind us of them, let us learn the folly of trusting in riches, or of placing our happiness in them and in the pleasures which they afford. If we are favoured with riches, honour or power, let us remember that they are bestowed upon us as a trust; that they are put into our hands, as well for the good of others, as for our own improvement in virtue, by the opportunities which they afford of exercising good dispositions. Let us remember that our true riches consist not in the temporal gifts of Providence; but in virtuous attainments and in beneficent practices, in the warmth of devotion and the fervour of benevolence. If we are thus distinguished, whatever may become of outward wealth, though it should be taken away from us, as it was from this rich fool, we shall have a treasure in the heavens which faileth not.

Luke xii. 22—31.	corresponds with	Matt. vi. 25——.
— 33.	- - - - - - -	20, 21.
— 39, 40.	- - - - - -	xxiv. 43, 44.
— 42—47.	- - - - - - -	45——
— 51—53.	- - - - - - -	x. 34—36.
— 54—57.	- - - - -	xvi. 2, 3.
— 58—.	- - - - - -	v. 25, 26.

Luke xiii. 1—17.

1. There were present at that season, some that told him, *or*, "*some came*

Digitized by Google

to tell him at the time," of those Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices.

Who these Galileans were, and what offence they had given to Pilate, to provoke him to such an outrage, we know not with certainty: for they are not mentioned by Josephus, the Jewish historian: but it is probable that they were the followers of one Judas Gaulonitis, who were so averse to the Roman power, as to deny the lawfulness of paying tribute to Cæsar, and to refuse to call any one their sovereign, or lord. These people were come up to Jerusalem, to offer sacrifice at the passover; and when assembled in the temple for that purpose, Pilate took the opportunity of attacking and putting them to death. So singular and so unheard of a calamity might induce some to suppose that these men had been guilty of some extraordinary crime, which God thought proper to punish in this new and extraordinary manner: but Jesus cautions his disciples against making such a conclusion.

2. And Jesus, answering, said unto them, Suppose ye that these Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans, because they suffered such things?

3. I tell you, Nay; but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.

That is, not in the same way, by having your blood mingled with your sacrifices, (for this could never be true of all the Jews, if it were true respecting any), but you shall all perish, as well as they, by a violent death; which actually took place at the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans. Those who informed him of this event were shocked with horror at the miserable fate of these wretched Galileans. Hence Jesus takes occasion to exhort them to save themselves from a like miserable end, by timely repentance.

4. Or those eighteen, on whom the

Digitized by Google

tower in Siloam fell, and slew them; think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem?

5. I tell you, Nay; but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.

The tower of Siloam was built near a pool of the same name in Jerusalem, where the inhabitants used to bathe themselves, and might perhaps be used for the convenience of those who went down to wash. The fall of this tower had crushed to death eighteen persons; a calamity which some might consider as a judgment of God upon them for their crimes; the more especially, as it took place without the interposition of human agency, which could not be said of the massacre by Pilate: but Christ warns his hearers against such a rash conclusion, and renews his exhortation to repentance; telling them that it was the only way in which they could save themselves from like calamities. To impress them more strongly with their danger, and with the necessity of immediate reformation, he delivers the following parable.

6. He spake also this parable: A certain man had a fig-tree planted in his vineyard; and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none.

7. Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig-tree, and find none: cut it down: why cumbereth it the ground? *or*, "*Why should it also make the ground useless?*"

8. And he, answering, said unto him; Lord, "*master*," let it alone this

Digitized by Google

year also, till I shall dig about it and dung it;

9. And if it bear fruit, well; *or*, "*then perhaps it will bear fruit*;" and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down.

The fig-tree planted in a vineyard was evidently intended to represent the Jewish nation, who enjoyed peculiar advantages for religious improvement, under that dispensation of religion with which they were favoured. The displeasure which the master of the vineyard expresses at finding no fruit, after looking for it for three years, represents the disappointment of God, when he perceived that the Jews did not improve the advantages which they had so long enjoyed. The means employed to render the barren tree fruitful, by digging about it and dunging it, refer to the extraordinary methods which God employed for reclaiming the Jews, by Jesus Christ and his apostles; and the order to cut down the tree, to the resolution which God had formed of utterly destroying the Jewish nation, who had so long disappointed his reasonable expectations.

Some commentators have supposed, that by the three years which the master of the vineyard is said to come seeking fruit, our Lord's ministry was intended, which had already lasted three years: but this interpretation will by no means suit the rest of the parable: for by the mutual agreement of the master of the vineyard and the gardener, the tree, that is the Jewish state, is to be spared no more than one year longer; whereas it appears that forty years elapsed from the time of the ascension of Christ into heaven to the destruction of Jerusalem.

The three years seem rather to allude to the time at which fig-trees, planted in Judæa, usually bear fruit, which is three years. A tree which bore no fruit for three years, must be abandoned, after that period, as incurably barren.

Others have also supposed, that by the vine-dresser

Digitized by Google

requesting that the tree might be spared for another year, is represented Christ's interceding with God, in the character of mediator, for the Jews; yet as Christ was sent by God to that people, and every thing he did was by his direction, there seems to be no ground for a reference to any supposed intercession of his. We are not to expect that every particular circumstance introduced into a parable, should have something corresponding to it in the interpretation: for many things are mentioned in order to render the story complete.

10. And he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the sabbath;

11. And behold there was a woman which had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years; *a Hebrew idiom for being troubled with an infirmity*; and was bowed together, and could in no wise lift up herself.

12. And when Jesus saw her, he called her to him, and said unto her, Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity.

13. And he laid his hands on her; and immediately she was made strait, and glorified God.

She considered God as the real author of her cure, and Jesus as only the instrument of performing it; she ascribes, therefore, the honour of the work to God.

14. And the ruler of the synagogue answered with indignation, *or*, "*spoke with indignation*," *for there was no previous address*, because that Jesus had healed on the sabbath-day; and said

Digitized by Google

unto the people, There are six days in which men ought to work; in them, therefore, come and be healed, and not on the sabbath-day.

By blaming the people he secretly accused Jesus, who encouraged them; he therefore took up the matter.

15. The Lord then answered him and said, Thou hypocrite! doth not each one of you on the sabbath loose his ox or his ass from the stall, and lead him away to watering?

Jesus calls the ruler by this name, because he placed religion in outward ceremonies only, and seemed to be entirely destitute of benevolence; and appeals to their own conduct in letting out their cattle for water on the sabbath; which they justified upon the principle that it was necessary for their comfort; and argues that what he had done in this instance was right; motives of compassion applying much more strongly to the one case than to the other.

16. And ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan hath bound, lo these eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the sabbath-day?

In the one case there is a brute to demand compassion, in the other, a human being, which is much more worthy of attention; and that not of an ordinary class, but a descendent of Abraham, who is allowed to be of much more worth than the rest of mankind; and she has been bound, not for a few hours only, like the ox, but for eighteen years, and is therefore much more deserving of compassion. The weakness with which this woman was afflicted is here attributed to Satan, who does not signify a real being, but is an allegorical per-

Digitized by Google

sonage, whom the eastern nations considered as the enemy of God and the source of all evil. We have several traces of this opinion in the sacred writings. Thus the affliction of Job is represented as coming from the hand of Satan, although it really proceeded from God, and Job always speaks of it in that light. And Paul calls the thorn in the flesh with which he was afflicted, by which is generally understood some bodily infirmity, the messenger of Satan, or a satanic messenger; and in another place he speaks of delivering over some persons to Satan, that is, punishing them with some bodily distemper. Agreeably to this language, the woman whom Jesus cured of her infirmity is said to be bound by Satan.

17. And when he had said these things all his adversaries were ashamed.

He had so completely answered their objections, that they were quite confounded, and had nothing to reply.

And all the people rejoiced for all the glorious things that were done by him.

Persons of rank and power among the Jews were filled with envy at the popularity which Jesus acquired by his miracles, because they imagined their own authority weakened thereby: but the common people, who had no such motive for jealousy, were greatly delighted with them.

REFLECTIONS

1. Let us endeavour to guard against those rash and uncharitable conclusions against which Jesus here cautions the Jews, who supposed that where there are extraordinary sufferings there must be extraordinary guilt. When applied to others, they tend to fill the mind with pride and self-conceit, as if we were the fa-

Digitized by Google

vourites of heaven, because we are exempted from troubles which others experience; and to harden our hearts against the miseries of the sufferers, by representing them as only enduring the punishment of their sins.—When applied to ourselves, they are the sources of terror, dejection, and dismay. Mankind seem in all ages to have been inclined to this error. It was the fault of Job's friends, who drew unfavourable conclusions respecting his character, when they saw him overwhelmed with calamity. It was the fault of these Jews respecting their countrymen; and it is what many Christians, notwithstanding the warning of their master, are strongly inclined to at the present day.

When we see men bringing evil upon themselves by their vices; when the intemperate man appears to have ruined his health by indulging his appetites to excess; when men of blood meet with others, who deal the same measure of cruelty to them which they have given to their brethren; when conscience renders life an intolerable burden to an offender against the laws of justice and humanity; here we need not scruple to say, "This is the finger of God, this marks the displeasure of heaven, and is a punishment inflicted upon the sinner for his crimes:" for here is an obvious connection between the calamity and the offence, and it was the intention of Providence to point out the one by the other. But where there is no such connection manifest, we are not justified in making such a conclusion. In regard to temporal calamities, one event happeneth to the righteous and to the wicked, and there is no knowing good or evil from all that passeth under the sun.

2. The parable of the fig-tree furnishes matter of serious alarm to those who have long enjoyed religious privileges, and neglected to improve them, whether they be nations or individuals: for it appears that God expects them to bear fruit by works of righteousness and piety; that he watches their behaviour with an attentive eye, and that there is a period beyond which his patience will not wait. Let not communities of men, who have long been distinguished by their advantages, and who have had them continued after many threaten-

Digitized by Google

ings to take them away, imagine that they will never be removed. From what happened to the Jews they may learn what will happen to them. A day of punishment is certainly coming, and will only be the more dreadful for being long delayed. Let them now, therefore, by timely repentance, endeavour to avert impending ruin. Let every sinner also remember, that although God may sometimes restore his health after being visited with threatening illness, and appear hence unwilling to give the fatal blow; yet the time will come when he will wait no longer, and when the tree must be cut down. Let every one of us fear lest the account given of the fig-tree be applicable to himself; and lest God should be provoked to issue the same order respecting him, as was issued by the master of the vineyard; Cut him down, why cumbereth he the ground?

3. We see the malignant nature of superstition, in the objections made by the ruler of the synagogue to Christ's healing diseases on the sabbath-day. It prefers the observance of ceremonies to the most important duties of life; to acts of charity and mercy. It not only darkens the understanding, but hardens the heart against compassion, and eradicates every humane feeling from the breast. Such was the baleful effect of superstition among the Jews; and such has been its effect in every place where it has acquired an ascendency, whether among heathens or christians; it is always accompanied with cruelty, and its footsteps may be traced by blood. Let us never forget that the design of religion is to make societies of men and individuals more excellent and happy; and that outward observances are of no further value, than as they tend to promote that end; that mercy, therefore, is to be preferred to sacrifice.

4. Let us join this woman and the rest of the people, in rejoicing in the miracles of Christ, and in glorifying God for them. They are striking instances of his almighty power, and illustrious evidences of goodness and condescension to the human race, the benefits of which are felt to the present day. Let us not cease to

Digitized by Google

praise him, therefore, for works which are beneficial to us, as well as to those for whose use they were first intended.

Luke xiii. 18—21. corresponds with Matt. xiii. 31—33.

Luke xiii. 22—33.

22. And he went through the cities and villages, teaching, and journeying towards Jerusalem.

Jesus was now going up to Jerusalem, for the last time, with the full persuasion that he should die there in the most painful and ignominious manner. This drew from him the sorrowful acknowledgment in the 50th verse of the last chapter; "I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened" or distressed "until it be accomplished!" His mind, however, was not so oppressed with the prospect of his sufferings, as to prevent him from discharging the duties of his office, by instructing the people wherever he came.

23. Then said one unto him, Lord, are there few that be saved?

The intention of the person who asked this question was probably to enquire whether the doctrine taught by Christ would be embraced by many, or confined to a few; in order either that if the number were small, he might have the honour of ranking himself among them, or that he might justify his own rejection of the gospel by the unbelief of the multitude. Believing in Christ, is with propriety called being saved, because it was attended with temporal deliverance; whereas unbelief produced inevitable destruction, in the calamities which awaited the Jewish nation. Christ, therefore, in his answer to this question, exhorts the person who made it, and others who might hear it, to enter the strait gate, that is, to embrace his religion, which was

Digitized by Google

at that time attended with many difficulties, and which might fitly be compared to entering a strait or narrow passage; and he enforces this exhortation, by assuring them that the time would come when many would seek an entrance into the kingdom of the Messiah, but would be refused admission.

And he said unto them,

24. Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able;

The question of this inquirer referred only to the reception of the gospel among the Jews: the answer of Christ implies that there would be many by whom it would be rejected; but that a time would come, the day of final judgment, when they would change their mind, when they would apply for admittance, and be refused: hence he infers the propriety of exerting all their endeavours to enjoy this advantage, while it might be obtained.

25. When once the master of the house is risen up, *or, by a slight correction of the present text,* "*hath composed himself,*" and shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us; and he shall answer and say unto you, I know ye not whence ye are.

The happiness of Christians in a future life is here represented, as in other parts of the gospel, under the idea of a feast, made by the master of a family for his friends; and the exclusion of the unbelieving Jews is represented by the rejection of strangers, who apply for admittance after the master of the family has sat down to meat. The parable and the application, however, are not kept entirely distinct, but intermingled, in such a

Digitized by Google

manner, however, as that the sense is sufficiently obvious. To the application of strangers for admittance, the master of the house very naturally replies that he knows them not, whence they are.

26. Then shall ye begin to say, We have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets.

This language is very properly put into the mouths of Jews, as addressed by them to Christ: for as he had lived among them and exercised his public ministry, eating and drinking with them at the same tables, and teaching in their streets, they would naturally hope that this would furnish them with some claim to his favour, inasmuch as it appeared that they were countrymen and familiar acquaintance. To this plea the master of the family replies, by again denying any knowledge of them as his friends, and desiring them to depart from him; for that notwithstanding he might have some acquaintance with them in the intercourse of life, yet their wicked conduct forbad him to regard them in any other light than as strangers.

27. But he shall say, I tell you, I know you not, whence you are. Depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity.

The Jews, who rejected the Messiah from a love of worldly greatness and an aversion to the pure doctrines of religion which he taught, accompanied also with the most surprising miracles, might be justly characterised as workers of iniquity.

28. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out.

The three patriarchs here mentioned, and the prophets, were held in the highest veneration and esteem

Digitized by Google

by the Jews; and they flattered themselves with the hope, no doubt, that when they died they should be admitted into their company, in heaven: but Jesus informs them, that, by rejecting him, they would deprive themselves of that honour, and hereby expose themselves to the deepest sorrow and the most cutting mortification; such as is usually expressed by tears and gnashing the teeth.

29. And they shall come, *or*, "*these shall come*," from the east and from the west, and from the north and from the south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God.

The question proposed to Jesus was, whether there were but few that should be saved, that is, who should believe in the Messiah; and his answer implies that not many of the Jews would believe in him; but at the same time he declares that great numbers from among the Gentiles, in all quarters of the world, would acknowledge his divine mission, and hereby procure themselves admission to the grand feast provided for all Christ's disciples in the kingdom of heaven.

30. And behold there are last which shall be first; and there are first which shall be last.

The Jews now stood first in the divine favour, and in the possession of religious privileges: but the time would soon come, when this order should be reversed; when the Gentiles, who now seemed to be neglected by God, should, by the general reception which they gave to the gospel of Christ, occupy the first place in his regard; while the Jews should be punished and degraded for their unbelief. Or perhaps the sense may be; the Gentiles, to whom the gospel will be offered last, shall be the first to embrace it.

31. The same day there came cer-

Digitized by Google

tain of the Pharisees, saying unto him, Get thee out, and depart hence: for Herod will kill thee, *or*, "*meaneth to kill thee.*"

From the well-known enmity of the Pharisees to Jesus, it is reasonable to suppose that this warning of his danger proceeded not from any concern for his security, but was given with a view to intimidate him, in order to prevent him from exercising his office any longer, or to drive him into Judæa, where the priests and Pharisees were prepared to put him to death. From Christ's reply it appears that Herod had some concern in this message, and that he had employed the Pharisees to deliver it. He was alarmed at the fame and popularity of Jesus; but having suffered so much in his own mind, from the murder of John the Baptist, he was afraid to involve himself in the same trouble, by putting Jesus to death: he took, therefore, this indirect method to drive him from his dominions.

32. And he said unto them, Go ye, and tell that fox, *that cunning artful man*, Behold I cast out dæmons, and do cures to-day and to-morrow, and the third day I shall be perfected; *rather*, "*end my course.*"

Tell him that in a short time I shall die; so that he need not trouble himself to put me to death; yet that, while I live, I shall go on with my work, without being deterred by his threatening. Some have supposed that there is a reference to the time which actually passed between the season at which Christ spoke and his death, and that this was no more than three days. But three days are too short a space for the many events which are afterwards recorded as having taken place before his death. This language is rather to be considered as expressing a very short but indeterminate time; just in the same manner as the phrase *two or three days*, reads in our own language.

Digitized by Google

33. Nevertheless, I must walk to-day and to-morrow and the day following:

Although I must die shortly, yet I shall pursue my work, without fear of interruption, for some time longer.

For it cannot be that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem.

Such is the wickedness of the inhabitants of that place, that they have been the chief enemies of the messengers of God in every age; so that they have been put to death no where else.

REFLECTIONS.

1. We learn from this passage of Scripture the guilt and danger of rejecting Christ. The Jews were under strong temptations to do this. Their manners were extremely corrupt, in consequence of their placing the whole of religion in the observance of external ceremonies; so that the pure doctrine which Jesus taught was highly distasteful. They expected a great temporal deliverer, and the humble appearance of Jesus corresponded not with their expectations. In the profession of the religion of their fathers they lived in peace; but in professing that of Christ they exposed themselves to the persecution of those in power, and to hatred from all men. The belief and the profession of Christianity, in such circumstances, was a strait gate; and it was necessary that those should strive who wished to enter it. They must contend with their own vices and prejudices, and with the vices and prejudices of other men; yet these difficulties did not excuse their unbelief, or exempt them from punishment. They are ranked with the workers of iniquity, and shut out of the kingdom

Digitized by Google

of heaven. Their cries for admission are not heard, although accompanied with tears.

Let us take care, in the present day, lest, by following the example of the Jews in rejecting Christ, we incur a like doom. To receive him as the Messiah is not now attended with the same difficulty as in the early times of the Christian religion; yet there are some still remaining which it requires resolution to surmount.—The majority of those around us are believers in Christ; but there are some who are not so, and who, with a zeal worthy of a better cause, endeavour to shake the faith of others, by starting objections to our religion and suggesting doubts. To answer these objections and to remove these doubts satisfactorily, it is necessary that we should inquire with care and diligence whether these things are as they are confidently stated to be; but to this trouble there are many who are not willing to submit, and who choose to remain in doubt; or to give up their faith in Christianity, without examining the foundations upon which it is built. To this they are also tempted by the hope of ranking with men who esteem themselves superior to vulgar prejudices, and who arrogate to themselves the character of wise and discerning; but above all, by the prospect of throwing off the restraints of Christianity with the profession of it. It should be remembered, however, that an unbelief proceeding from these motives is criminal, and that it will bring down upon us the same dreadful consequences which it brought upon the Jews. It shows us to be indifferent about the knowledge of the truth, and more anxious for the indulgence of our passions than for fulfilling the will of heaven. Let every one then be careful how he rejects Christianity, and not resolve upon so important a measure, without the most diligent and impartial examination.

2. The conduct of Jesus, when threatened by Herod, may teach us how we ought to act, when opposed in the discharge of our duty to God by any of the princes or powers of the earth. He declares his intention to pursue his work, in defiance of Herod's threatenings, and to entrust himself to the protection of

Digitized by Google

Heaven. In this he has given us an example of fortitude and courage which well deserves our imitation, if we should be brought into like circumstances. If we should be prohibited from assembling for public worship, or for hearing religious instructions, or for performing any other important duty which our maker claims from us, under the threatened penalty of imprisonment or death, let us do as Christ did—resolve to follow the calls of duty, whatever the consequences may be; and if reproached for opposing lawful authority, let us say, after the example of the apostles, Whether it be right that we should obey God rather than men, judge ye. In matters of religion and conscience we are accountable to God alone for our conduct. If civil rulers offer to interfere with his authority, and prohibit any thing which he has enjoined, we are justified in disobeying them; nay, we are required to do it: to act otherwise would be treason and rebellion against him. Nor need we be afraid of the consequences: the God whose authority we maintain will protect us from danger; or if he permit us to suffer ought from the resentment of man, will make us ample compensation hereafter.

Luke xiii. 33——. corresponds with Matt. xxiii. 37——.

Luke xiv. 1—14.

1. And it came to pass, as he went into the house of one of the chief Pharisees, *rather*, "*of one of the Pharisees which was a ruler*," *that is*, *a member of the Sanhedrim*, to eat bread on the sabbath-day, that they watched him.

This invitation seems to have been given Jesus by this ruler, not from motives of respect or hospitality,

Digitized by Google

but with the insidious design of betraying him; to find out something in his language or conduct, which, when reported by the Pharisees, might injure his character: for we are told that they watched him.

2. And behold there was a certain man before him which had the dropsy.

As they were endeavouring to ensnare Jesus, it is not unlikely that this man was introduced to him for that purpose: for otherwise it is not easy to account for his finding admission into the house of a ruler, and being permitted to appear, loaded as he was with disease, before his guests.

3. And Jesus, answering, spake unto the lawyers, *that is*, "*to the teachers of the law*," and Pharisees, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath-day?

There were different opinions among the teachers of the law, upon this subject: but the sentiment which generally prevailed, among those of them who were of the sect of the Pharisees, was, that it was unlawful to make up medicines on the sabbath, except where it was necessary to prevent immediate death. On the present occasion, however, they did not answer Christ's question; being unwilling to prevent him from performing a miracle on the sabbath, or afraid to enter into a controversy with him.

4. And they held their peace; and he took and healed him, and let him go, *rather*, "*sent him away*."

He might have healed this dropsical person by speaking a word; but he chose to do it rather by laying his hand upon him, as on many other occasions, that it might appear that the cause of the cure proceeded from himself, and not from any other source. His disorder was obvious, from the unnatural size to which he was

Digitized by Google

swollen; and his cure, by the sudden removal of this swelling*.

5. And answered them, saying, Which of you shall have an ass or an ox fallen into a pit, *rather*, "*a well*," and will not straitway pull him out on the sabbath-day?

As these teachers of the law had refused to answer his question about the lawfulness of healing on the sabbath, he now justifies what he had done, by appealing to their own practice, in regard to their cattle, when any misfortune had befallen them, and they were in danger of perishing.

6. And they could not answer him again to these things.

7. And he put forth a parable to those which were bidden, when he marked how they chose out the chief rooms, *rather*, "*the chief seats.*"

The Jews, like other eastern nations, reclined upon couches at their meals; each couch containing three persons; and the greatest compliment that could be paid to a man was to desire him to place himself first upon the couch. This the Pharisaic teachers of the law were eager to do, without being invited; which drew from Christ the following admonition, which is here called a parable, because Jesus illustrates his meaning by an example.

Saying unto them;

* "If any one should ask how this could be," says Dr. Doddridge, "I answer; he that at once could cure the dropsy with a touch, could, if he pleased, annihilate the excess of water which caused it; and it is reasonable to believe the cure was wrought in such a manner as would make the reality and perfection of it immediately apparent."—Fam. Ex. vol. ii. p. 151. note.

Digitized by Google

8. When thou art bidden of any man to a wedding, *rather*, "*a wedding-feast*," sit not down in the highest room, "*in the first place*;" lest a more honourable man than thou be bidden of him;

9. And he that bad, "*invited*," thee and him come and say to thee, Give this man place; and thou begin with shame to take the lowest place;

Common prudence ought to teach them not to seat themselves first, lest the master of the feast should mortify them by desiring that they would seat themselves last.

10. But when thou art bidden, "*invited*," go and sit down in the last place; that when he that invited thee cometh, he may say unto thee, Friend, go up higher; then shalt thou have worship, "*respect*," in the presence of them that sit at meat with thee.

The first argument which Christ employs to dissuade men from taking the first place is the fear of disgrace: the next is the hope of honour, which is more likely to be secured by those who shun it, than by those who seem eager to obtain it.

11. For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

This maxim Christ had before delivered to his disciples, when they contended among themselves which should be the greatest: he who was the least ambitious

Digitized by Google

of honour would be deemed the most worthy of it; and it was a rule that would hold equally good in the common intercourse of life; mankind generally taking pleasure in honouring the humble, and in mortifying the proud.

12. Then said he also to him that invited him; When thou makest a dinner or a supper, call not, "*invite not*," thy friends nor thy brethren, neither thy kinsmen nor thy rich neighbours, lest they also invite thee again, and a recompence be made thee:

13. But when thou makest a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind.

By this language Christ cannot mean absolutely to prohibit men from showing respect to their rich friends, neighbours and relations, by inviting them to their houses, and making entertainments for them; or to require that such testimonies of regard should be shown only to the poor: for he himself accepted of invitations to several entertainments, and suffered a costly perfume to be expended upon his person, rather than to be sold for the poor: but he intends to represent the little value of hospitality to the rich, when compared with hospitality to the poor; and for this purpose enjoins the one and forbids the other; just in the same manner as, he says, in another place, Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that which endureth to everlasting life; where he means no more, than that men should seek the one in preference to the other. Nor can Christ mean, by advising us to invite the poor when we make a feast, that splendid entertainments should be provided for the poor, as they now are for the rich: for this would be a disadvantage rather than a benefit to persons in the lower class of life: but he intends to recommend performing acts of beneficence for the poor, who

Digitized by Google

are in want, rather than for the rich, who stand in need of nothing.

14. And thou shalt be blessed, *or*, "*happy:*" for they cannot recompence thee: for thou shalt be recompenced at the resurrection of the just*.

He recommends hospitality to the poor, as a noble instance of disinterested benevolence, because there could in this case be no prospect of a return, except in a future life, when, indeed, such acts of beneficence would meet with an ample recompence. Whereas, hospitality to the rich might proceed from the narrow principle of self-interest, and arise from nothing better than a desire of experiencing from others the kindness which we show to them.

The language of Christ upon this occasion will be illustrated by what he says on another; If ye love them that love you, what reward have ye? for sinners also love those that love them; and if ye do good to them that do good to you, what thank have ye? for sinners also do even the same; and if ye lend to them of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? for sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again; but love ye your enemies, &c. and your reward shall be great.

REFLECTIONS.

1. The conduct of Christ, in healing on the sabbath-day, teaches us a maxim which he has repeatedly endeavoured to inculcate, that humanity is a leading principle of our religion, to which ceremonial observances are to give place, whenever they happen to interfere, and both cannot be attended to. We also learn

* See Luke xx. 35, 36. Phil. iii. 11. Amner on the resurrection, p. 96.

Digitized by Google

from his conduct on this occasion, that we are to teach and practise what is right, however offensive it may be to others, and however hazardous to ourselves. He persists in the same practice, and maintains the propriety of it, although surrounded with enemies, who were watching his conduct, and earnestly looking for something whereby they might ruin his character. He had no idea that his usefulness could be promoted by concealing the truth, or by silently countenancing what was wrong.

2. The directions which Christ gives respecting the place which men should take at public entertainments, shows us, that the surest way to honour is humility.—Mankind are disposed to take an ill-natured kind of pleasure, in mortifying the vanity and humbling the pride of those who rank themselves above their station, and claim precedency in society as their right and their due. Such men are regarded as usurpers over the rights of others, and all men are united to oppose them; whereas the modest and humble man, who is unconscious of his own merit, or afraid to assert it, but ready to acknowledge the pre-eminence or claims of others, attracts the affection of every one, and engages their services in his favour. They esteem him most worthy of honour, who appears to think that he does not deserve it. Learn to think modestly then of your own abilities and attainments, and be not afraid of undervaluing them. If they are underrated, there are enow who will discover the mistake, and be in haste to publish their discovery to the world, as a proof of their own discernment; they will soon advance you to the honour of which you think yourselves not worthy.

3. Let us never forget the estimation in which Christ holds hospitality to the poor, and the weighty motives by which he recommends it. It is to do good where it is most wanted, and where there is no prospect of gain. It is helping those who can make no return for your kindness, except by their thanks and their blessings. It is benevolence which is noble and godlike; such as Jesus practised towards his followers;

Digitized by Google

such as the Governor of the universe exercises towards his children. Nor shall it always remain without reward: the time will come, when those who have sowed bountifully in this way shall reap bountifully; when the measure received into their lap shall be fully pressed down and running over. This is what will take place at the resurrection of the just; and it must also be remembered that there will be a resurrection of the unjust; when those who have been insensible to the cries of the poor, and have neglected to supply their wants, while they spent their substance in making entertainments for the rich and great, will likewise receive according to their works. In vain will they urge the greatness of their sufferings, and the wretchedness of their condition, as an argument for a remission of their punishment. That mercy which they refused to others will be denied to them.

The language of Christ does not absolutely condemn making entertainments for the rich and great, as in all cases unlawful; but only represents in a strong manner the little value of such beneficence, when compared with showing hospitality to the poor:—yet surely, in times of great and general scarcity, when one part of mankind can with much difficulty obtain the necessary means of subsistence, and suffer much from want and hunger, it cannot be right that the rich should waste the means of subsistence by luxurious feasting, and thus aggravate a calamity which is in itself sufficiently distressing.

Luke xiv. 15—33.

15. And when one of them that sat at meat with him heard these things, he said unto him, Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God.

In the preceding verse Jesus had promised that those who showed hospitality to the poor should be recompensed at the resurrection of the just: this reminded

Digitized by Google

one of the company of the happiness of those who are permitted to partake of the blessings which God has provided for good men at that period, which it was usual for the Jews to speak of under the idea of a feast, or entertainment. In the twelfth and thirteenth verses Christ had advised those who make a feast, to invite to it the poor and the maimed, the lame and the blind: this led him to deliver a parable, in which the master of the house was obliged to have recourse to this method of filling his house with guests, and which was intended to foretel the rejection of the gospel by the rulers of the Jews, and the reception of it by many of the common people, but especially by the Gentiles. The Jew who made this observation, probably intended to congratulate his countrymen, as being the only persons who would be admitted to the privilege of eating bread in the kingdom of heaven with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and other eminent men: but Christ intimates that that honour would be declined by the most distinguished of his countrymen, and was reserved for some of the common people, and of the Gentiles; since the former would prefer the employments and pleasures of this world to the happiness of the next, which was offered to them.

16. Then said he unto him; A certain man made a great supper, and invited many;

17. And sent his servant at supper-time, to say to them that were invited, Come: for all things are now ready.

As they delayed to come at the usual time, the master sent a servant to remind them of their engagement, lest they might have forgotten it.

18. And they all with one consent, *or*, "*from one cause*," began to make excuse. The first said unto him, I have bought a piece of ground, "*a farm*," and

Digitized by Google

I must needs go and see it. I pray thee have me excused; *or*, "*make my excuse.*"

19. And another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them, "*to try them.*" I pray thee make my excuse.

20. And another said, I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.

These excuses afforded no good reason for desiring to absent themselves from an entertainment, to which they had been respectfully invited, and which they had promised to attend: for he that had bought a farm, and he that had bought oxen might, without inconvenience, have deferred visiting them till the next morning; and even he that had just married a wife could not violate any rule of propriety in leaving her for a few hours.—To excuse themselves upon such frivolous pretences, discovered indifference to the entertainment, and contempt of the master of it, who had invited them. No wonder, therefore, that he was angry, when he found in what manner they intended to treat him. This represents the conduct of some of the principal persons among the Jews, who, upon slight pretences of attending to their worldly concerns, paid no attention to the invitations given them by Jesus, to enter into his kingdom.

21. So that servant came and showed his master these things. Then the master of the house, being angry, said to his servant, Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor and the maimed, the halt, *or*, "*lame*," and the blind.

Digitized by Google

The entertainment being slighted by those for whom it was first intended, the master of the feast resolves that such great preparations shall not be made to no purpose: he therefore sends his servant into the streets, where he was likely to find such miserable objects, to invite the poor, the crippled and the diseased, to partake of the feast which had been provided for his rich neighbours. This represents to us the conduct of God, in directing Christ to address himself to the poor, to fishermen, to publicans and harlots, when his message was neglected by the rulers of the Jews. Not that we are to suppose, however, that all the followers of Jesus were persons of this description; yet the greater part of them were certainly despised for the meanness of their condition, or their former way of life.

22. And the servant said, Master, it is done as thou hast commanded, and yet there is room.

The servant, knowing the generous intentions of his master, and that he wished for as many guests as his apartments would hold, tells him that although he had collected all whom he could meet with in the streets and lanes, the house was not full, and wishes to know what further he would have him do.

23. And the master said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them, "*press them*," to come in, that my house may be filled.

As he had collected all the poor that were to be found in the city, he directs him now to go into the high roads leading to it, and to the hedges, where they usually have their station, and to use the most earnest persuasion to induce them to come in, if they discovered any reluctance: for he was resolved, if possible, to fill his house, and to prevent those who were first invited from being admitted, if they should afterward change their mind.

Digitized by Google

24. For I say unto you, that none of those men which were invited shall taste of my supper.

This second order, to search for the poor in the highways, refers to the intention of Providence to send the gospel to the Gentiles, and to invite them into the privileges of the Christian Church, to fill up the place of the Scribes and rulers of the Jews, who had refused to accept them. A people who seemed to be cast off by God, as the Gentiles were, are fitly represented by the outcasts of society, who occupy the highways and hedges. From the servant being directed to *compel* them to come in, some have inferred the propriety of employing violence, in order to make men proselytes to the Christian religion, or to restore them to the true faith. But it should be remembered that it was to a feast that he was directed to bring them, to which it is not usual to force men, although it may be common to entreat and press them. Nor was one servant alone strong enough to force in a great number of beggars, against their will. Besides, it is well known that the word here translated *compel* is used to express earnest persuasion by reason and argument. Thus Christ is said to have compelled his disciples to go into a ship, although he neither drove nor thrust them into it, but employed exhortation, or the influence of his authority, for that purpose.

25. And there went great multitudes with him.

They were persons of various characters, and followed him from different motives; most or all of them expecting that he would set up a temporal kingdom, in which they should enjoy all kinds of gratification. But he takes care to undeceive them upon this subject, by telling them that those who became his disciples, must give up their dearest friends and relatives, and bear all kinds of persecution and self-denial. This he did to prevent men who came from worldly views, from following him: for he knew that they would do no credit to his cause, with such mistaken apprehensions.

Digitized by Google

And he turned, and said unto them,

26. If any man come to me, and hate not his father and mother and wife and children and brethren and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple:

What is here to be understood by hating father and mother, Matthew has explained in a parallel passage, when he represents Jesus as saying; He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me. To hate father and mother and other relatives is therefore to love them less than Christ, agreeably to a phraseology that frequently occurs in Scripture. The profession of Christianity in early times occasioned quarrels among the nearest relatives; and unless men were more attached to Christianity than to their friends, they must renounce it.

27. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple.

Crucifixion was the most cruel and infamous of the punishments inflicted by the Romans. Hence the cross came to be used metaphorically for all kinds of evils; to bear the cross, therefore, and come after Christ, is to expose ourselves with fortitude to the greatest evils in his cause. Thus men must be ready to die, before they could be the disciples of Christ.

In order to convince them of the propriety of deliberation, before they professed themselves his followers, he reminds them of what men think it right to do in similar circumstances, when they have important undertakings before them.

28. For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it?

Digitized by Google

29. Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him,

30. Saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish.

As a man who is about to erect a house first calculates the expence, lest he should expose himself to the ridicule of attempting an undertaking which he was not able to accomplish; so, he who thinks of professing himself my disciple ought, in all prudence, to consider whether he be able to make the sacrifices which it requires; lest, by deserting me, he expose himself to like shame.

The same prudent precaution is also observed by one king going to war with another. He first considers whether the bravery of his soldiers and the skill of his generals will enable him to cope with an adversary who has twice his number of troops: or else, if he has been so unwise as to omit this precaution, he sues for conditions of peace. So the followers of Christ should not rashly engage with adversaries, whom there is no probability that they shall be able to overcome.

31. Or what king, going to war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth, whether he be able, with ten thousand, to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand?

32. Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an ambassage, and desireth conditions of peace.

33. So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple.

Digitized by Google

In the preceding verse Christ had required his disciples to be ready to part with their friends: he here requires them to be ready to part with their possessions. If they loved their property better than they loved their master, they could not continue his disciples, in an age when the professors of Christianity would be stripped of every thing which they possessed by their enemies, or be called upon to leave it behind them, when they were sent to preach the gospel.

REFLECTIONS.

1. The folly of neglecting religious concerns, upon trifling pretences, is not peculiar to the higher rank of Jews in the time of Christ. It prevails, alas, too much, among all classes of persons in the present day. When they are called upon to attend to their highest interests, and to their eternal welfare, they excuse themselves, by pleading that they have this business to execute, or that pleasure to pursue; that they have no time for religious concerns, their attention being engaged by matters of higher moment; when it is undoubtedly true, that if religion ought not to occupy the whole of their time and thoughts, it has at least a claim to the first place in their regards: for it must be allowed, that an eternal existence is of infinitely greater value than this short life, and that what relates to our well-being during that period, is more worthy of our attention than any temporal object. Nor is there any thing irreconcileable between our present and future interest: for the Being who has placed us here has given us time sufficient, if we manage it well, for attending to the concerns of both worlds. The necessary occupations of life need not prevent us from attending to our religious interest, and it is only they who are averse from or indifferent to religion, that plead them as an excuse.—Such conduct, however lightly men may think of it at

Digitized by Google

present, involves in it no small degree of guilt. It discovers great unconcern about the interests of a future life, and great contempt for God, who has sent his messengers to inform us of their importance, and to invite us to attend to them. It is also doing unspeakable injury to ourselves. Beware, sinners, how ye slight the calls of the gospel, which invites you to enter into the kingdom of heaven! They will not be made to you again; and although you should repent of your folly, you will not obtain admission, even if you seek it carefully with tears.

2. We learn, from the passage which has been read, the value of the religious truths communicated to us in the gospel. They are to be maintained by us with the loss of friends, of property and even of life, if necessary: they are of more consequence to our welfare, or to that of mankind at large, than any of these objects. If not called upon, in these times, to show our regard to them in this painful manner, let us not decline any testimony of respect which our situation requires, and will afford: particularly, let us not complain of the time or pains which are necessary to become acquainted with Christian truth, or of the expence or trouble of communicating it to others: it is the best means of advancing our own improvement and the happiness of the world.

3. In the conduct of Christ, in warning his followers of the difficulties which they had to encounter in becoming his disciples, we see an instance of the uprightness of his character. He did not wish to deceive men by flattering them with hopes of pleasures which they would not be able to obtain; nor to make proselytes to his religion, under false pretences of promoting their temporal interests; but tells them plainly what they had to expect; even the loss of every thing which was deemed valuable in life, and exhorts them seriously to consider whether they were prepared to make such sacrifices, before they professed themselves his disciples. What openness and candour does this discover! How different from the arts which impostors have practised!

Digitized by Google

How worthy is such a teacher of our unlimited confidence!

Luke xiv. 34——. corresponds with Matt. v. 13.

Luke xv. 1—10.

1. Then drew near unto him, *rather*, "*kept coming unto him*," all the publicans and sinners, for to hear him.

The publicans were Roman officers, employed to collect the public taxes from the Jews. Their employment was in itself sufficiently obnoxious, as being a mark of that people's subjection to a foreign power; but was much more so, in consequence of the injustice and extortion of which these officers were frequently guilty. It is probable, therefore, that few of the native inhabitants would accept of so odious a post, and that it was generally filled by foreigners. To these, the Jews, to whatever nation they belonged, gave the appellation of sinners; not because they regarded them all as men of immoral characters, but in conformity to their own phraseology; according to which the Jewish people, in consequence of their intimate relation to God, were a holy nation, and saints; and therefore those who did not enjoy the same marks of the divine favour would of course be called sinners. Hence it is that publicans and sinners are so often joined together in the New Testament. That by sinners we are in some cases to understand Gentiles, is evident from our Lord's foretelling, Matt. xx. 19, that the rulers of the Jews should deliver him to the Gentiles, to put him to death; which is explained by him afterwards, when the band of soldiers came to apprehend him, by saying that he was about to be delivered into the hands of sinners, Matt. xxvi. 45. These people, who were Gentiles by extraction and publicans by profession, assembled together at the place

Digitized by Google

where Jesus now was, in order to hear him preach; influenced, as it should seem, by a desire of being instructed and reformed.

2. And the Pharisees and Scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them.

The law of Moses prohibited Jews from marrying heathens, lest, by familiar intercourse with idolaters, they might be drawn from the worship of the true God; but the interpreters of the law extended the prohibition much further, forbidding Jews to eat with heathens, or to have any intercourse with them. When, therefore, they saw Jesus permitting these publicans, who were heathens, to come and hear him, and to sit down with him at meat, they complained of his conduct as a breach of their law. Christ vindicates his conduct, not by arguments drawn from Scripture, in which, however, there are examples of God's showing mercy to Gentiles, as well as Jews, upon their repentance; but by arguments, drawn from the conduct of men in common life, which afforded a plainer and more forcible way of reasoning.

3. And he spake this parable unto them, saying,

4. What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it?

5. And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing;

6. And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with

Digitized by Google

me: for I have found my sheep which was lost.

7. I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.

Christ reasons with these Pharisees upon their own principles, and shows that they would justify him in what he was doing. They esteemed themselves just persons, who had no need of repentance*. According to their own opinion, therefore, they were already secured to God, by walking in the paths of virtue, while these Gentiles had wandered from them, and were in the way to destruction. It was natural, therefore, to expect that God would discover more anxiety for those who were in danger of being lost than for those who were secure, and that he would act in this case in the same manner as those do who are afraid that they may be deprived of their property, who go out to seek it, and when it is found, manifest greater joy upon its recovery than in all which they possessed before. Such being then the temper of the Divine Being, in regard to the Gentiles, his messenger and prophet was fully justified in conforming himself to the disposition of the Being whom he represented. Thus it is that Christ vindicates himself from the charge of showing attention and giving encouragement to heathen publicans, who manifested a disposition to repentance, so as to appear better pleased with them than with Scribes and Pharisees. We are not, however, to suppose that because the sheep which was lost is but one, while ninety and nine are represented to be secure, Christ intended to represent the Gentiles as bearing the proportion of one to ninety-nine to the Jews; or that that is the proportion of bad men to good; but he probably intended thereby to express the small proportion which those few

* Luke xviii. 11.

Digitized by Google

repenting publicans bore to the number of those who assumed to themselves the character of righteous persons. This parable occurs before in Matt. xviii. 12. but it is there applied to a different purpose. Christ now adds a second parable, to the same purpose as the first, with a view more completely to illustrate his meaning.

8. Either what woman, having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it?

9. And when she hath found it, she calleth her friends and her neighbours together, saying, Rejoice with me: for I have found the piece which I had lost.

10. Likewise I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.

As a woman who has lost only one piece of money out of ten, carefully searches for it, and, when found, rejoices; so God, when only one of his rational creatures out of a great number appears to be lost, by forsaking the path of virtue, rejoices at his repentance, and welcomes his return. And as this is the temper of the Divine Being towards a penitent, all his messengers and prophets are bound to show the same disposition.

It is said, in the tenth verse, that there is joy in the presence of the angels of God at the repentance of one sinner. We are not, however, to understand by that phrase that the joy at that event is felt by the angels; it is joy manifested by God, in the presence of his angels, who constitute the court of heaven; and signifies the same thing as the phrase in the former parable, "joy in heaven;" that is, joy with God in heaven: so

Digitized by Google

that no inference can be drawn from this passage, as to the knowledge which angels have of the events of this world, or the interest which they take in them.

REFLECTIONS.

1. We learn hence in what light to regard sinners; they are like sheep that are gone astray, or like valuable property that men have lost. They cease to fulfil the wishes of the proprietor; they no longer afford him pleasure; they are in the road to certain destruction.—Their Creator intended to bestow upon sinners much honour, and to raise them to a high degree of perfection and excellence. He purposed to render them of extensive usefulness in the creation; but they are defeating his purposes, and ruining themselves; they are indulging in vices which pervert their natures from the ends which they were designed to answer; which pollute their souls and degrade their characters; which are the source of present pain, and will end in unspeakable ruin. Yet they are not irrecoverably gone; the sheep which has wandered from the fold may be brought back; the money which is lost may be found again.—Their habits are not in general so confirmed, but that they may be changed; nor their characters so completely corrupted, but that they may be rendered pure. This is to be accomplished principally by instruction; by warning them of the folly and danger of the course which they are pursuing; by representing to them the excellence of that master whose service they have forsaken; the beauty of virtue and the glorious rewards which attend it. By such means may the wanderers be brought back, and those who were lost be saved from final ruin.

2. How worthy of our admiration and love is the temper of God towards the penitent sinner, as here re-

Digitized by Google

presented! He rejoices in his recovery, and welcomes his return; nay, he seems to take more pleasure in his reformation than in all the virtues of those who never offended. What a noble spirit of benevolence and forgiveness is this! to value one rational being at so high a price, and that being a heinous offender! to seek him who had voluntarily departed; to press him to return who alone could be benefited by the change, and to rejoice in his recovery as much as if there had been no other being to engage his affection! Remember, sinner, that the Being from whose service thou withdrawest thyself is not an enemy who hates thee, but a friend who loves thee, and who wishes for nothing so ardently as to do thee good. He is grieved for thy departure, and will rejoice to bring thee to himself. Canst thou bear to think of forsaking such a friend? Canst thou remain insensible to so much goodness?

2. Let the ministers of religion learn hence not to despise the meanest and most degraded of mankind.—Christ did not shun the company of heathens and publicans, when they appeared inclined to receive instruction; but received them gladly, and conversed with them freely. In this it appears that he was but fulfilling the benevolent intentions of his heavenly Father, who would have all men to be saved, and is not willing that any should be lost. Let us not be backward to follow so illustrious an example. There are many of the human race, who, in the opinion of their brethren, are sunk to the lowest state of degradation, by a base employment, by want of birth, or of wealth, by rude manners or by uncultivated minds; with whom few of better rank choose to associate, and who are deemed the outcasts of society; and they are often neglected by men from whom better things might be expected; by the ministers of the gospel of Christ; who, from a vain idea of their own superior attainments, like these self-righteous Pharisees, stand aloof from all whom they imagine not to have made the same proficiency in knowledge and virtue with themselves. But they are not animated with the spirit of Christianity, which teaches us to condescend to men of low estate; nor do they

Digitized by Google

follow the example of their master, who, wherever he found a rational creature, regarded him as the offspring of God, as a being capable of virtue or vice, as an heir of immortality or a victim of destruction, as a soul to be saved or to be ruined, and therefore an object of kindness and compassion, whom he was to do every thing in his power to instruct or reclaim, however degraded by station, vice or ignorance.

Luke xv. 11—32.

In order to understand the design of the ensuing parable, it is necessary to keep in mind the occasion on which it was delivered, and the connection in which it stands. We find from the beginning of this chapter, that the Scribes and Pharisees had accused Jesus of admitting publicans and sinners, or rather, heathen publicans, to hear him, and of permitting them to sit with him at table. In answer to this accusation he delivered two parables, which we have already considered, in which he shows, that as men pay more attention to what they think themselves in danger of losing, than to that which is not exposed to danger, so he was justified in showing greater attention to Gentiles, whom they considered as lost, than to Jews, who were already secured in the service of God, or at least thought themselves to be so. In the story before us he has still a reference to the same subject, and endeavours to illustrate the propriety of his own conduct, and to expose the pride and envious temper of his adversaries. The younger brother, who is dissatisfied with his father's house, goes from home, and, after wasting his portion in riotous living, returns a penitent to his father's house, represents the Gentiles, who early forsook God, and lived in a state of great wretchedness, but seemed now inclined to return to him. The elder brother, who is so much displeased at the welcome reception given to the younger, represents the Pharisaic Jews, who already began to murmur at the attention paid to the Gentile converts, and expressed their dissatisfaction in much

Digitized by Google

stronger terms, when they found that they were to be admitted, upon the profession of Christianity, to all the privileges which they themselves enjoyed.

11. And he said, A certain man had two sons;

12. And the younger of them said to his father, *rather*, "*to their father*," Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me; and he divided unto them his living, "*his substance.*"

This young man was weary of the restraints which he suffered at his father's house, and wished to go where he should be more at liberty.

13. And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living.

He left Judæa, to go among the Gentiles, that he might be free from the restraints of religion, and no longer liable to the reproofs of his father and of his former friends.

14. And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want.

15. And he went and joined himself to, "*connected himself with*," a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields, *to his farm*, to feed swine.

A Jew, who would have considered himself as defiled by eating swine's flesh, must have been reduced to great

Digitized by Google

extremity, when he submitted to so dishonourable and odious an employment as that of feeding these animals.

16. And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat; and no man gave unto him.

What are here called husks, were a kind of chesnut produced in the east, and used for feeding swine; and sometimes the food of the poorer class of inhabitants.—Others, however, suppose that the word signifies offal in general.

17. And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!

18. I will arise, and go to my father, and I will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee,

19. And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants.

20. And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him.

The father was melted into compassion at the sight of his son, who had been long absent, and who, by want of clothes and other signs of distress, appeared to be extremely wretched. Without waiting, therefore, for his approach, he ran out to meet him, to express in the tenderest manner his affection, and the joy which he felt at his return*.

* See Harmer, vol. ii. p. 53.

Digitized by Google

21. And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, *against God*, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.

The father, however, notwithstanding the humiliating confession and proposal of the son, orders him to be treated with the highest marks of distinction.

22. But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring upon his hand and shoes on his feet;

23. And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it, and let us eat and be merry:

24. For this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.

The last member of the sentence explains the first: by saying that his son had been dead and was alive again, he only meant, that having supposed him to be lost, to see him again was like receiving him from the dead.

And they began to be merry.

We have hitherto had an account only of the wanderings and repentance of the younger brother, together with the behaviour of the father to him upon his return. We shall next see the conduct of the elder brother upon the occasion, which exhibits the temper of the majority of the Jewish nation towards the Gentiles.

25. Now his elder son was in the field, and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard music and dancing.

These commonly attended feasts in eastern countries*.

* See Harmer, vol. i. p. 409.

Digitized by Google

26. And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant.

27. And he said unto him, Thy brother is come, and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound, "*in good health.*"

28. And he was angry, and would not go in, therefore came his father out and entreated him.

29. And he, answering, said to his father, Lo these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment; and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends.

This language contains a just picture of the temper of the Pharisees and of the greater part of the Jewish nation, who were under their influence: for they entertained the highest opinion of the excellence and merits of their own service, and could not bear to have others placed on the same footing, in regard to the divine favour, with themselves.

30. But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living "*thy substance,*" with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf.

He does not deign to say my brother; but calls him his father's son, as if he was the only one whom he treated in that character. The father had good reason for being offended with this insolent speech, in which he is accused of gross partiality to a profligate son: yet

Digitized by Google

he still proceeds to reason mildly with the elder brother, upon the impropriety of the resentment which he discovered, and to justify his own conduct.

31. And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine.

Thou art always at home, and therefore it was impossible for me to show my joy at thy return after a long absence, as I have done for thy brother. Thou hast the use and enjoyment of all that I possess, besides what I gave thee together with thy brother; thou art not, therefore, without reward. The father next repeats the reasons which he had before given in verse 24th, for rejoicing on this occasion; reminding him that the person who was received was his brother, as well as his own son.

32. It was meet that we should make merry and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found.

REFLECTIONS.

1. We have here a striking but just picture of the wretched consequences of youthful folly. A young man, who cannot bear the restraints of parental authority, resolves to quit his father's roof, and to seek for some place where he can give loose to his desires, and enjoy every gratification which his heart can wish for. The effects of this resolution are soon visible: his substance is squandered away; the sources of gratification are dried up; his friends, if he had any, forsake him, and he is left to starve, or compelled to have recourse to

Digitized by Google

the most odious employment for a maintenance. Such is the account given of the younger brother in the parable; and it is but too just a picture of many other young men, who were about to be introduced into life with every advantage for doing well, but who destroy all their fair prospects, by forsaking the guide of their youth, and placing themselves under the direction of their passions. The first part of their career may be pleasant, but it is quickly followed by a long period of pain and trouble, of shame and remorse. May others take warning from their sufferings in time, and be careful to avoid a like conduct! Let them beware of leaving a kind parent, to pursue schemes which their own imagination has suggested: for they hereby forsake an experienced counsellor and a faithful friend. From that day they will probably have to date the beginning of their ruin. A young man who has been guilty of this folly, and who has by that means reduced himself to the lowest state of wretchedness, is a fit emblem of the Gentile world, who separated themselves from pious ancestors, to follow the devices of their own hearts, and to worship idols. Their history, from that time to the period of the introduction of christianity, is a melancholy detail of human depravity and misery.

2. In the conduct of the father towards the prodigal son, we have a striking representation of the goodness of God towards penitent sinners.

Great was the offence which this son had committed against his father, in setting light by the advantages of his company and counsels, and disobeying his authority; yet as soon as he appears to be sensible of his folly and misconduct, by turning his face towards home, the father, without waiting for his approach, or permitting him to make his submission, anticipates what he is about to say, runs forth to meet him, and receives him with every mark of affection and joy. Such, and much greater, were the offences of the Gentiles, and of all other sinners, against their Father in heaven: yet does he manifest the like readiness to forgive them. They have no occasion to fear that he will spurn them from his presence, or refuse the pardon which they ask: his

Digitized by Google

arms will be open to receive them, and his heart will bid them welcome. How different is this representation of the supreme Being, from the conceptions of those who think that he is to be moved to exercise forgiveness, by the sufferings and intercession of a third person! Even an earthly parent, if he has the bowels of a father, does not stand in need of such a motive, to incline him to show mercy to his offending offspring; much less can we suppose it of our Father in heaven.—Come then, ye wanderers from your Father's house; acknowledge your faults, throw yourselves at his feet, and depend upon being forgiven.

3. How odious is the spirit which the elder brother discovers! He has the highest sense of the merit of his own services, thinks they have been very imperfectly rewarded, and murmurs to find that his younger brother is so well received, after living in a state of alienation and absence. This is an exact delineation of the temper of the Jews towards the Christian converts, not only in the instance here referred to, but during the whole period of the first planting of Christianity. Let us cultivate a more generous spirit, and learn to rejoice in seeing the blessings of the gospel extended to all mankind, as well as bestowed upon ourselves.

Luke xvi. 1—13.

1. And he said also unto his disciples, There was a certain rich man which had a steward, and the same was accused unto him that he had wasted his goods; "*his substance.*"

Jesus, in this parable, from the example of a crafty man, who secured to himself a comfortable retreat, when he should be dismissed from employment, intended to recommend to his disciples such a wise use of

Digitized by Google

worldly possessions as would secure to them an inheritance in the heavens.

2. And he called him, and said unto him, How is it that I hear this of thee? Give an account of thy stewardship; for thou mayest be no longer steward.

The steward had nothing to reply to the charge brought against him, and therefore only considers what he shall be able to do for himself when discarded.

3. Then the steward said within himself, What shall I do: for my Lord, "*my master*," taketh away from me the stewardship? I cannot dig, to beg I am ashamed.

While he was thus musing, a thought occurs to him which relieved him from all his difficulties. As he was not yet put out of office, he resolves to make use of the power with which he was intrusted, to secure a retreat amongst his master's tenants, when dismissed from his service.

4. I am resolved what to do, that when I am put out of the stewardship, they, *the tenants*, may receive me into their houses.

5. So he called every one of his lord's, "*master's*," debtors unto him;

These, as appears from the nature of the debt, were also his tenants, and bound, by lease or written agreement, to pay him in kind a certain proportion of the produce, in oil or wheat or other things, according as the growth of the estate happened to be.

And said unto the first, How much owest thou unto my master?

Digitized by Google

6. And he said, An hundred measures of oil. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, *thine account of the debt*, and sit down quickly, and write fifty.

7. Then said he to another, And how much owest thou? And he said, An hundred measures of wheat. And he said unto him, Take thy bill and write fourscore.

The measure, or bath of oil, contained a little more than seven gallons and a half of our measure; and the measure of wheat, eight bushels and a half. So that to remit fifty of the first and twenty of the second, was no small favour, and might very well dispose the tenant to receive the steward who bestowed it into his house.

8. And the master commended the unjust steward, *or*, "*the steward for his unrighteous dealing*," because he had done wisely, "*because he had done it prudently.*"

We cannot suppose that the master really approved of the conduct of one of his servants, in cheating him; but he commended the prudence with which he provided against a day of distress.

For the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light.

It might be better rendered, wiser *for their generation*, i. e. for their life in this world, than the children of light are for their life, i. e. their life in the world to come. Men of the world are more provident for their future existence here, than religious men are for their future existence hereafter.

Digitized by Google

9. And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness, *or*, "*of these uncertain riches*," that when ye fail, "*when ye die*," they may receive you, *or*, "*you may be received*," into everlasting habitations.

The meaning of this verse is considerably obscured by the manner in which it has been translated. The word mammon is taken from the Syriac language, in which Jesus spake, and signifies riches, or, which is the same thing, the God of riches. These riches may with propriety, and agreeably to the language of Scripture, be called false, deceitful, uncertain, but cannot be denominated unrighteous, in the common sense of that word, which is only applicable to moral character. Jesus exhorts his disciples to make such a use of things which were of such an uncertain nature, as to derive from them substantial and everlasting benefits; and his words may be thus paraphrased: As this steward secured to himself friends and a home, by the use which he made of what belonged to his master, so I exhort you to make such a prudent use of the possessions of this world, that they may prove real friends to you, at a time when you stand most in need of their aid, and procure for you not such a temporary dwelling-place as this steward obtained, but an everlasting residence in the world to come.

As some persons might not be able to comprehend what connection there could be between the right use of wealth in this world and the possession of heaven hereafter, he proceeds to explain this connection in the next verses.

10. He that is faithful in that which is least, is faithful also in much.

He who employs his worldly possessions for the purposes for which they were bestowed by Providence, is justly entitled to the happiness of heaven: for it is acknowledged that he who is faithful to the trust reposed

Digitized by Google

in him, in regard to things of little value, will be equally faithful in regard to things of greater worth. He, therefore, who has made a right use of temporal good things committed to his care, deserves to be intrusted with such as are of infinitely greater value, even such as are eternal. On the contrary, if he has been unfaithful in the less instance, he does not deserve to be trusted in the greater.

And he that is unjust in the least, is unjust also in much.

11. If, therefore, ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous Mammon, "*in the uncertain riches*," who will commit to your trust the true riches?

He who has been unfaithful to the trust reposed in him, in regard to the good things of this life, which are so uncertain and perishable, by abusing the gifts of Providence, or by neglecting to apply them to the purposes for which they were bestowed, how can he expect to be trusted with the permanent joys of heaven, which will be much more capable of being abused or misemployed?

12. And if ye have not been faithful in that which is another man's, *or*, "*which belongs to others*," *that is, riches which pass from hand to hand*, who shall give you that which is your own, "*that which is permanent?*"

Christ is still speaking upon the same subject as before, and infers that those who do not make a right use of what is so changeable as human riches, are not worthy to be trusted with the riches of heaven, which can never be taken from them, and which would be entirely at their own disposal.

13. No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and

Digitized by Google

love the other, or else he will hold to the one and despise the other; ye cannot serve God and Mammon.

Christ is here replying to a secret objection, which he perceived would be made to the advice that he had just given respecting the right use of riches: for covetous persons would say; Although we love money, and devote much of our time and attention to it, yet we discharge our duty to God. This Christ says is impossible; in the same manner as it is impossible that a servant should, at the same time, please two masters, who are of opposite dispositions, and each of whom expects all his services and the whole of his affections. Riches are here personified, and spoken of as a living being; just in the same manner as in our own language we frequently personify the world, saying, The world does this or that.

REFLECTIONS.

1. In this parable, we may see how pride and an aversion to labour urge men to the commission of great crimes. Having brought themselves into difficulties by their extravagance, they fancy that there is no other way of extricating themselves than by fraud or rapine: for they cannot dig, and to beg they are ashamed.—Having been accustomed all their days to an easy employment, they cannot submit to one that is more laborious; and to solicit the means of subsistence from the charity of others, is what their pride cannot stoop to. They have, therefore, recourse to secret fraud or open violence for support; and thus the commission of one crime leads them to a greater, till they have sunk themselves into the lowest depths of guilt and ruin.—To prevent such fatal consequences, let parents accustom their children, whatever their prospects in life may be,

Digitized by Google

to honest labour, and train them up to habits of industry; that if, by their own folly or the hand of Providence, their circumstances should be reduced, they may still have a resource within themselves, and not be tempted to betake themselves for subsistence to unlawful means. Let them carefully inculcate upon their minds, that although poverty, when the consequence of idleness or misconduct, is a disgrace; when the effect of misfortune, it ceases to be so; and that in any case, it is better to be poor than dishonest, and to beg bread than to cheat or steal, in order to obtain it.

2. There is in this parable much to alarm and much to comfort the rich; for it must surely be deemed matter of serious alarm, to find that their possessions are no more than a trust, committed unto their hands by the Governor of the universe; that he watches over the execution of it, and will punish their mismanagement and unfaithfulness with the loss of what is of infinitely greater value. It may well be deemed good ground of alarm to learn, as they do here, that those riches in which they place their hope, and which they are disposed to think secure, are so uncertain and transitory, that they cannot be called their own, but are properly denominated the property of others, who are to enjoy them after them; and that, however they may flatter themselves with the hope of being able to unite the love of the world with the performance of their duty to God, they are absolutely irreconcileable; like serving two masters. It may afford them comfort, however, to know, that the uncertain possessions of this life, when properly employed, will secure to them the true riches: that if they seek them only to do good, and expend them, when obtained, in providing for their relatives and friends, in acts of beneficence to the poor, in promoting the interests of truth and virtue in the world, in advancing the religious instruction and moral improvement of mankind; instead of being snares to their peace and the cause of their condemnation, they will prove their best friends, and procure for them the most important benefits. I will, therefore, congratulate those who are thus distinguished by Providence,

Digitized by Google

upon their having in their hands the means of securing to themselves everlasting habitations, and exhort them to employ these means for that purpose, in the way just mentioned. Do good, my brethren: be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate, laying up in store for yourselves a good foundation against the time to come, that you may lay hold on eternal life. Be assured that in acting thus you proceed upon principles of the truest prudence; upon such principles as guide those children of this world who stand in the highest reputation for wisdom. You part with a less good to secure a greater; with what is fleeting and transitory for what is substantial and everlasting; while enjoying the present moment, you are by that means mindful of the future.

Luke xvi. 16—18, corresponds with Matt. xi. 12, 13. v. 18, 32.

Luke xvi. 19. to the end.

The ensuing parable relates to the same subject as the last, the right use of wealth; and was intended to show that rich men, if they attend to nothing but the gratification of their passions, will be miserable in a future life; but that the poor, if they are virtuous, will be happy. It is formed upon a supposition that two men, at their death, are immediately removed to a place of reward or punishment. This is not agreeable to the language of scripture in other instances, which always speaks of retribution as taking place only after the general resurrection: but it is very allowable in a parable, where the speaker does not confine himself to strict matter of fact, but supposes things which have no real foundation, in order to convey more effectually moral instruction.

19. There was a certain rich man, who was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day.

Digitized by Google

This is the description of a person of the first rank in point of wealth: for to fare sumptuously or feast every day, must be very expensive, and require great riches; and purple, which was afterwards the peculiar habit of kings and emperors, was always deemed the richest and most superb of dresses, which none but the very great presumed to wear. The purple of the ancients consisted of fine linen died of a purple colour; hence it is here described as purple and fine linen.

20. And there was a certain beggar, "*a certain poor man*," named Lazarus, who was laid at his gate, full of sores;

21. And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores.

He was so feeble and decrepid, through ulcers and want of food, that he could not walk to the rich man's gate, but was obliged to be carried thither; so poor, that he was willing to accept of the crumbs from his table, in which he was probably gratified; and so destitute of clothing, that he had nothing to cover his ulcers. Such a man seemed to have united in his person all the evils which belong to human wretchedness: to him the name of Lazarus, which signifies *no help*, was properly applied; while his rich neighbour was the reverse of all this, and seemed to possess every enjoyment which the heart of man could desire.

22. And it came to pass that the poor man died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom.

Christ, after the language of the Jews, speaks of heaven, or the future state of good men, as a feast or entertainment, to which a number of persons sit down, or lie down, after the manner of the ancients, in order to partake of it; and as among the progenitors of the Jews, Abraham was distinguished for his piety, to him the

Digitized by Google

most honourable place was allotted. Wherefore, when Christ meant to declare that some of the Gentiles should be thought worthy of the first seats in this kingdom, he says, Matt. viii. 11, that they should sit down with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. In allusion to the same idea, he represents Lazarus at his death as carried into Abraham's bosom, that is, placed next to him, upon the same couch; in which situation the head of Lazarus would be under the breast or bosom of Abraham; in the same manner as John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, and who sat next to him at table, is said to have leaned on the bosom of Jesus, John xiii. 23. Into this situation Lazarus is said to be conveyed by angels, that is, by intelligent beings, sent for that purpose from heaven to earth, or by any instrument employed by the Divine Being to remove him out of the world: for in the language of Scripture, every thing which God does, by whatever means, he is said to do by the instrumentality of angels.

The rich man also died, and was buried.

Lazarus was laid under ground, as well as he; but the circumstance of his being buried is mentioned, in order to show that funeral honours were paid to him, which had been denied to the poor man. We have seen what the condition of each of these persons was in this world; we are next informed how their circumstances were reversed in the next.

23. And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.

It is necessary here to keep in mind what I mentioned upon entering upon this part of the evangelical history, that what is here delivered is no more than a parable, and that that parable represents men in a state of retribution immediately after death, or before the time appointed by God for that purpose; so as to be an anticipation of that period. Hence we find the rich man having a body, being tormented in flames, seeing

Digitized by Google

Abraham and Lazarus, and addressing himself to the former; things which correspond very well with the state of men after a resurrection of the body, but which by no means suit the idea of separate spirits, which are supposed to be invisible beings, without a body, without limbs or organs. To represent likewise the abodes of the righteous and wicked, in a future life, as so near to one another, that they are only separated by a great river or gulf, and the inhabitants upon the opposite banks as seeing and conversing with each other, may serve very well for the scenery of a parable, and be perhaps adopted from the language of the Jews respecting a future state, or from the Elysium of the Greeks; but cannot be supposed to be an exact account of the future heaven and hell of Christians. In parables, many circumstances different from or contrary to truth are frequently introduced, in order to complete the story, and more effectually to answer the purpose of the speaker.

24. And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue: for I am tormented in this flame.

The rich man calls Abraham his father, as being a Jew: desiring that Lazarus might be sent to perform this office for him, is a plain proof that he had relieved his wants, when laid at his gate: for otherwise he would have been the last person to whom he would have applied to grant a favour.

25. But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy life time receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented.

Having enjoyed what thou deemedst good things in thy past life, in the gratifications of sense and in all such pleasures as riches afford, thou canst not think it un-

Digitized by Google

reasonable, if thou now hast thy share of evil, which is necessarily connected by the laws of God with thy ill conduct: and as Lazarus suffered so many calamities in life, it is but equitable that he should now enjoy some pleasure, to balance the evil that he has experienced, and to recompence him for his good conduct under it. Here Abraham endeavours to convince the rich man that it is not reasonable that his request should be complied with: in the next verse he shows that it is not possible.

26. And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed; so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us that would come from thence.

Thou canst not receive the relief which thou desirest from us, because we are separated from thee by a gulf, or stream, which neither thou nor he can pass. The rich man, finding that he could obtain nothing for himself, next endeavours to do something for his brethren, whom he had left behind him in the world, and who were imitating his example.

27. Then he said, I pray thee, therefore, father, that thou wouldst send him to my father's house:

28. For I have five brethren, that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment.

He wishes that Lazarus might be sent to inform them of what was passing in the other world; that there were severe punishments for those who lived in sensual pleasure, unmindful of God and of a future life, and that he, in particular, was at that time enduring the most excruciating tortures for that course of conduct which they were likewise pursuing. This, he hoped, would convince them of their error, induce them

Digitized by Google

to live in a different manner, and prove the means of preserving them from the same dreadful condition.

29. Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.

Let them hearken to what they teach, and do as they direct, and this will preserve them from the misery which you now endure.

30. And he said, Nay, father Abraham; but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent.

I despair of their receiving good from the ordinary methods of instruction; but if a person were to rise from the dead, and assure them, from his own knowledge, of what takes place in another world, it would induce them to alter their conduct.

31. And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead.

If they attend not to men who proved that they were sent from God, by the most distinguished miracles, neither would they attend to one who professed to come from the dead in the name of God: for all that he could have to recommend him would be no more than a miracle, against the evidence of which their conduct shows that they are already hardened. To comply with thy request, therefore, would be useless, if it were possible.

REFLECTIONS.

This parable furnishes us with many useful reflections. We see,

Digitized by Google

1. That what is highly esteemed among men is often odious and contemptible in the sight of God; and that what they despise he values. Nothing appears more respectable, in the eyes of mankind, than a rich man, superbly clothed and feasting every day.—Many there are who think that the happiest condition which the world can afford; who envy those who enjoy it, and would willingly sacrifice truth and justice in order to attain the same situation. Such men look upon the condition of Lazarus with disgust and horror. A poor man full of ulcers, clothed in rags, destitute of friends, laid at the rich man's gate, and thankful for the meanest offal which comes from his table, as the only means to support life, is a truly pitiable and loathsome object: yet this is the man who is regarded with complacency by God, who stands high in his favour, and for whom the first place of honour and enjoyment is destined in another world. Glory not ye rich men in your wealth, which is not accompanied with the smiles of divine favour: for it shall soon be taken away from you. Murmur not ye virtuous poor, at the miseries of your condition. Envy not the rich and great their present superiority: for your condition and theirs shall soon be inverted. Those who are now your benefactors may become your petitioners: for you shall be exalted, while they are degraded; you shall be comforted, while they are tormented.

2. The rich may learn that to be free from great crimes, is not all that is expected from men in their condition, and that is necessary to qualify them for future happiness. This rich man is not accused of gross and flagrant violations of duty. He is not charged with murder or adultery, with fraud or oppression; nor even with the total want of humanity: for Lazarus, it appears, obtained a subsistence, scanty enough indeed, at his gate, and the favours which he had conferred upon him in that situation were so considerable, that he had no doubt of his readiness to make every return in his power. But he had given himself up wholly to the gratification of his appetites. His mind was immersed

Digitized by Google

in sensual pleasures or in worldly cares, and he had acquired no relish for the pure and refined pleasures of contemplation and devotion. Although enjoying the richest bounties of Providence, he had not thought of the beneficent author, nor acknowledged his obligations to him. Such a man, although free from the stain of other crimes, has contracted much guilt, and is not qualified for the enjoyment of heaven. From his doom let the rich learn their own danger, and be careful that they do not fall into the like errors.

3. This parable teaches us the dreadful nature of the sufferings of the wicked in a future world. The rich man is represented as burning in the fire; the most terrible punishment which we are acquainted with; and although this language may be considered as metaphorical, yet it must be allowed to represent some pain or suffering equally formidable, if not more so. To this, whatever it may be, must those who have forgotten God and neglected their duty submit, without hope of alleviation. They cannot leave their dismal abode for a moment; they shall not be allowed a drop of water, the apparently most trifling favour, to ease their distress; but they must endure all that God has appointed for them, and for as long a time as he shall think proper. Let sinners seriously think of this, and then they will not regard sin as so trifling a matter, but shun it as the greatest evil into which they can fall.

4. If the ordinary methods of instruction with which God has furnished us in the scriptures do not reclaim men from their vices, it is not likely that this effect will be produced by any extraordinary means.—The rich man thought that his brethren would have been frightened out of their sins by the appearance of one from the dead, who had seen all the horrors of the damned. But the same arguments, whatever they were, which rendered their minds unmoved by the threatenings of the law and the prophets, would probably make them equally insensible to those which might be delivered by such a messenger. This observation justifies the conduct of Providence, in not having re-

Digitized by Google

course to new and unusual methods of reforming mankind, when those which have been employed have failed of success; and it ought to render us contented with our present advantages.

Luke xvii. 1, 2. corresponds with Matt. xviii. 6, 7.
3, 4. - - - - - - 21, 22.

Luke xvii. 5—19.

5. And the apostles said unto the Lord, Increase our faith.

What particular circumstance induced the apostles to make this request, this writer does not inform us. They had often been reproved by their master for their want of faith in his or their own miraculous powers; and the propriety of the present request might have been suggested to them by a consciousness of their own deficiency in this respect; or it might be made immediately after their having failed to cure the epileptic youth, mentioned by Matthew (xvii. 14 and 15), and after our Lord's telling them, verse 20, that they had failed through unbelief. By these reproofs and the exhortation which Christ delivers to his disciples, (Mark xi. 22), Have faith in God; or, as it is better rendered in the margin of our bibles, Have the faith of God, that is, a strong and mighty faith; it appears that he considered faith as in their own power to acquire. There can be no doubt, however, that Jesus, by performing in their presence miraculous works of an extraordinary nature, was able to give them much assistance in strengthening their faith; and therefore there was no impropriety in their applying to him for this advantage. But petitions thus addressed to Christ by his disciples, while he was present with them, will by no means justify offering prayer to him, now he is in heaven; which prayers he cannot hear, unless he be present in every place at the same time, an idea which we can entertain of none but God.

Digitized by Google

To remove the difficulty attending this verse, it has been conjectured* that it ought to be translated, not Increase our faith, but, Propose to us faith, i. e. an example of faith; such an example as may illustrate its efficacy and strengthen our own. This explanation will correspond very well with the reply of Christ on this occasion, in which he shows what wonders a strong faith is capable of performing; but it is not authorised by the original.

6. And the Lord said, If ye had faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye might say unto this sycamine-tree, Be thou plucked up by the root, and be thou planted in the sea; and it shall obey you.

Christ does not mean by this language that they should literally be able to do this thing; but that a strong faith would enable them to do things as extraordinary and wonderful as removing a sycamine-tree into the sea; which was a proverb among the Jews, to express any thing that was deemed impossible.

The words which follow seem to have no connection with the preceding, but to have been delivered upon some occasion, to teach the disciples humility. This Jesus has done in the form of a parable. They were disposed to think that if they had discharged one part of their duty well, they might sit down, satisfied with what they had done; but Jesus informs them that several things were expected from them, and that when they should have done all, there was nothing of which they might boast.

7. But which of you, having a servant ploughing, or feeding cattle, will say unto him, by and by when he is come from the field, Go and sit down to meat;

This verse will be more intelligible, if translated in rather a different manner, by altering the punctuation of the words, and transposing them a little. "But

* See Wakefield's Note.

Digitized by Google

which of you, having a servant ploughing, or feeding cattle, will say unto him, when he is come from the field, Come straitway, and sit down to meat; that is, neglecting me."

8. And will not rather say unto him, Make ready wherewith I may sup, and gird thyself, and serve me till I have eaten and drunken; and afterward thou shalt eat and drink.

It is not sufficient for an hired servant, that is to plough or to be a shepherd, that he do that one business for which he is principally hired; but other common offices there are, which belong indifferently to all servants, such as waiting at table and other things; and when he has done his work in the fields, for which he was hired, such as ploughing or tending cattle, he must set himself cheerfully to perform the other offices, before he thinks that he has done his duty, or expects to receive his ordinary food, his daily wages. So, although it be your principal business to preach the gospel, work miracles and propagate my religion in the world, think not that this is the whole of your duty. There are other things of less moment, which are also expected from you, but for which, however, you will deserve no thanks.

9. Doth he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I trow not, "*I think not.*"

10. So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants; we have done that which was our duty to do.

As the servant who waited upon his master when he came from the field deserved no thanks from him for what he had done, because it was no favour, and nothing more than what was expected from all servants,

Digitized by Google

so ye, when ye have done every part of your duty, acknowledge that ye are servants who have conferred no favour, and therefore can claim no reward. The word unprofitable, by no means corresponds with the idea intended to be conveyed here: for the servant spoken of in the parable was not a useless servant, but one who had merited no thanks, in as much as he had done nothing more than what he was required and expected to do: therefore the persons who correspond to him in the explanation must be such as come under the same description, that is, persons who have conferred no favour on God by their services, and can consequently merit no thanks. This representation was well calculated to check all pride and boasting. It is true, however, that God can derive no profit from the services of any of his creatures, and in that view they may be all considered as unprofitable; but this is not the idea which Christ intends to convey.

11. And it came to pass, as he went to Jerusalem, that he passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee.

That is, through Galilee first and Samaria afterwards, which lay between that country and Jerusalem. So John tells us (iv. 4.) that when Jesus left Judæa to go into Galilee, he must needs go through Samaria.

12. And as he entered into a certain village, there met him ten men that were lepers, which stood afar off.

Persons afflicted with this disease were considered by the Jewish law as unclean, and therefore ordered to be kept without their camp, when in the wilderness, and without their cities, when settled in Canaan. There were ten persons in this disorder, without the village through which Jesus passed; who, being excluded from all intercourse with other persons, associated with each other, in the same manner as we find four lepers without the gates of Samaria, when it was besieged by the Syrians, 2 Kings, vii. 4.

Digitized by Google

13. And they lifted up their voices, and said, Jesus, master, have mercy on us.

Their situation, in consequence of being excluded from society, was truly wretched; and having heard of the cures which Jesus had performed for others in a like situation, they hoped that he would grant them relief.

14. And when he saw them he said unto them, Go, show yourselves unto the priests.

They were the persons appointed by the law to judge whether a leprosy was cured: there was also this additional reason for sending them to the priests, in the present instance, that the certainty of the cure, and therefore the reality of the miracle, would be proved by the testimony of an impartial person.

And it came to pass that as they went they were cleansed.

It does not appear that Jesus told them that they should be cured, but as much as this was implied in his sending them to the priest; and they so understood him: for they immediately set out for that purpose, expecting to be cured before they came to him, which accordingly happened.

15. And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God;

Although this miracle was performed at the will of Jesus, yet this man very properly considered God as the real author, who can alone alter the course of nature which he has established. To him, therefore, he first gives praises for the cure he has received; but he thinks that thanks are due to Jesus likewise, who was the instrument of God in conveying the favour: he therefore renders them to him next.

Digitized by Google

16. And fell down on his face at his feet, *at the feet of Jesus*, giving him thanks; and he was a Samaritan.

17. And Jesus, answering, said, Were there not ten cleansed; but where are the nine?

18. There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger.

The Jews considered the Samaritans as strangers or Gentiles, although they worshipped the God of Israel. It is observable that Christ takes every opportunity of holding out to public notice the faith and other virtues of Gentiles; which must have greatly tended to remove the prejudices of the believing Jews against them.

19. And he said unto him, Arise: go thy way: thy faith hath made thee whole, "*healed thee.*"

We learn from numerous instances that a certain degree of faith in the divine power was necessary for those who received miraculous cures, as well as for those who performed them. This man possessed as much as was requisite for this purpose, and therefore is said to be cured by his faith.

REFLECTIONS.

1. We may observe from this passage that the duties of life are many and various. The husbandman and shepherd had not finished their work with the labours of the field; but they had duties to perform when they

Digitized by Google

came home, which were not less expected from them than the former. Thus every man has some duties which are peculiar to his profession, and others which are common to him with the rest of mankind: but the performance of both is requisite, in order to complete his services in other relations, as a husband, a master or a father; as a subject of civil government; as an inhabitant of a particular country; as a member of the world at large. He may have much to do in each of these capacities; and every other man will have a like variety in his duties, in proportion to the different relations in which he happens to be placed. The error into which men are most in danger of falling, in regard to this subject, is paying attention to that part of their conduct which is most conspicuous and likely to be noticed, while they neglect duties of a more private nature, but not of less consequence to the welfare of society. Let it be our care to discharge both.

2. Let us ever keep in mind the view here given of the merit of human conduct, even when it is most perfect. When we do our duty most exactly we have nothing whereof to boast. Our best services deserve no thanks: for they are no more than what our duty requires, and what we are bound to perform. It is also true that there is not one of us who does not in many instances fail of what is required from him; who does not worship God with much less fervour, and observe his will with less care, than his perfections demand, and he himself is able to practise; who does not do less for restraining his appetites and passions, for promoting his own religious improvement and the good of others, than his circumstances will admit of. This consideration furnishes more ground for shame and sorrow than for boasting; and in regard to those instances in which men have done the best which they were able to do, they must remember, that both their inclination to do good and their ability to perform it, come from God; which precludes all pretences to pride. If at any time, therefore, O man, thou art inclined to be vain of thy

Digitized by Google

good deeds, and to glory in what thou hast done, recollect these considerations, and be silent!

3. How great is the goodness of God in rewarding such services! Those good actions which he himself enables us to perform, which are accompanied with numerous failings and offences, he thinks proper to honour with his favour now, and with an eternal life of ever-increasing felicity, in heaven. What bounty and beneficence are these! Blessings bestowed, where punishment is due; an everlasting recompence, where there is no claim to the smallest favour. Let us never cease to admire and adore the divine goodness.

4. The circumstances attending the cure of the leprous men deserve to be noticed, on account of the evidence which they afford that it was done by divine power. The disorder with which they were afflicted is well known to be of the most obstinate kind, and never removed but by long medical or other treatment; yet here we find that it is removed at once. The cure was also performed while Christ was at a distance, so that there could be no room for any collusion between him and the lepers, or for practising any of the arts of imposture; and not upon one person only, who might perhaps be supposed to become well of a sudden, from some unknown cause, but upon ten men, at the same time. Such an event, taking place in such circumstances, can only be accounted for by the power of God, which was present with Christ, and acted by him.

5. How unnatural was the conduct of the greater part of these men! They had received an important favour, which restored them to health and the society of their fellow men, at their own earnest request; but they would not turn back a few paces to thank their benefactor. A notable miracle had been wrought upon them; but they neglected to give God glory for it.—Let us be careful to avoid the sin of ingratitude, either to God or man; and in particular, when our health is restored after long and dangerous illness, let us not omit to give God the glory of our recovery, by thanking him for it in public as well as in private.

Digitized by Google

Luke xviii. 1—14.

1. And he spake a parable unto them, to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint;

In this parable Jesus has a reference to what he had just been saying, in the preceding chapter, of the destruction of Jerusalem. This event was highly desirable to the disciples of Jesus, as it would free them from the persecution of the Jews, who proved to be their bitterest enemies: but as it would be many years before it took place, and Christians would suffer much in the mean time, they would be in danger of desponding, and of ceasing to pray for its approach. Against this error therefore he now endeavours to guard them, by recommending unremitting perseverance in their petitions to God for this important change.

2. Saying, There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man.

He was a man of abandoned character, yet intrusted with the important office of deciding differences which might arise among men, and of redressing the wrongs of the injured.

3. And there was a widow in that city, and she came to him, saying, Avenge me of, *or*, "*do me justice against*," mine adversary.

This request was reasonable, and what a public magistrate was bound to comply with from his office. But this judge felt none of the principles which ought to have actuated one of his profession.

4. And he would not for a while. But afterward he said within himself,

Digitized by Google

Though I fear not God, nor regard man;

5. Yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, "*do her justice*," lest by her continual coming she weary me.

What he would not grant to the calls of justice and the cries of the widow, he readily yields for his own ease.

6. And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith.

This parable suggests to you useful instruction.

7. And shall not God do justice for his own elect? "*his chosen people?*" which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? *rather*, "*though he delay long towards them?*"

God's elect are the people whom he has chosen and separated from other nations, to be favoured with revelations of his will, with divine teachers and other religious advantages, for the purpose of preserving the knowledge and practice of true religion in the world. These were at first the descendents of Abraham only: but now they are all who profess faith in Christ, from whomsoever descended, whether Jew or Gentile. Those of them who were Jews suffered great oppression from their countrymen, but had ample justice done them at the destruction of the Jewish state and people; and it was the design of Jesus, by this parable, to encourage them to pray earnestly and unremittingly for that event.

The design of Jesus is not to represent God as an unjust judge, who may be compelled to comply with our wishes by importunate intreaties; but his argument is this: Since a person of that character will do justice for those who ask for it, from a regard to his own ease, how much more reasonable is it to suppose that God

Digitized by Google

will do the same thing, from the benevolence and rectitude of his own nature! The mode of reasoning is exactly of the same kind with that which you have exhibited in Luke xi. 5, &c. for encouraging the disciples to ask the Holy Spirit, or to pray for miraculous powers; where a man goes to his friend to ask bread at midnight, and is represented as obtaining by importunity what would not have been yielded to charity.

8. I tell you that he will do them justice speedily. Nevertheless, when the son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth, *rather*, "*in the land*," *that is, the land of Judœa.*

The faith here spoken of is the belief that God would do justice speedily for his elect, which induces those who entertain it to pray to him night and day for that purpose. Our Saviour's question seems to imply that there would be little of this kind of faith in Judæa, at the time when he should come: accordingly the apostle Peter speaks of some (2 Peter, iii. 4.) who at that time began to say, "Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation?" And Matthew, in the corresponding passage, represents Jesus as saying, that on account of the afflictions which should precede the destruction of Jerusalem, many would be offended, and the love of many wax cold. It must be remembered that the coming of the son of man here spoken of was not his own personal appearance, but the manifestation of his glory in the punishment of the Jews, for rejecting him and ill-treating his disciples.

9. And he spake this parable unto, *or*, "*concerning*," certain, which trusted in, *or*, "*in regard to*," themselves, that they were righteous; and despised others.

Digitized by Google

10. Two men went up into the temple to pray;

They resorted to the temple, because, although God is every-where, yet that place was considered as his more immediate residence.

The one a Pharisee, the other a tax-gatherer.

The former, in high reputation for his strict observance of the law; the latter, in ill repute on account of his profession.

11. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, *or*, "*the Pharisee stood by himself, and prayed thus*;" God, I thank thee that I am not as other men are; extortioners, unjust, adulterers; or even as this tax-gatherer.

He first mentions the vices from which he was free, and afterwards the virtues by which he was distinguished.

12. I fast twice in the week; I give tythes of all that I possess.

The services for which the Pharisee values himself were no where required by the law of Moses, and were practised by him and the rest of his sect only from ostentation: hence Jesus, in another place, tells them that they fast to be seen of men; and that they pay tithes of mint, anise and cummin, of their garden-herbs, while they neglect the weightier matters of the law, mercy, justice and fidelity: so that, however true what the Pharisee here says of himself might be, what he had done was of no value in the estimation of God. What seems blameable in the temper of this Pharisee is his detailing with pleasure the supposed vices of other men, and attributing to himself the opposite excellen-

Digitized by Google

cies, when it did not appear that he possessed them; or at least, not in such perfection as to justify him in dwelling upon them with so much satisfaction. The temper of the tax-gatherer is the reverse of this. He neither boasts of his great virtues, nor his eminent services; neither does he suppose himself better than other men; but, under a deep conviction of having committed many offences, he humbly acknowledges his guilt and prays for forgiveness.

13. And the tax-gatherer, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven; but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner!

He would not presume to come near a man who appeared so much more righteous than himself as this Pharisee.

His words are few but proper; and his actions, in fixing his eyes upon the ground and in smiting his breast, strongly express the humility of his mind and the deep contrition which he felt for his offences.

14. I tell you this man went down to his house, "*went home*," justified rather than the other.

He was esteemed or accepted as righteous in the sight of God, rather than the other. The humble prayer of the offending but repenting tax-gatherer, was more acceptable to the Divine Being than the external sanctity of the Pharisee, accompanied with proud confidence.

For every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

He that standeth high in his own estimation in the scale of excellence, stands low in the estimation of

Digitized by Google

God: but he who has a humble opinion of his own merits is highly esteemed by God.

REFLECTIONS.

1. I observe that encouragements and exhortations to persevere in prayer to God are not less necessary for us than they were for the first disciples. We wish for events like to those which were looked for by the first Christians, when they longed for the destruction of the Jewish power; and we meet with like obstacles to the accomplishment of our wishes, and are under the same temptation to despond. The simple religion of Jesus has been greatly corrupted by doctrines and ceremonies of human invention; and these corruptions have every where taken place under the protection of the civil power, and are thought necessary to the good government and welfare of the state. Those who employ the light of reason and revelation to dispel these errors, and to restore the gospel to its original purity, are every where opposed, proscribed and persecuted. Their endeavours to reform the christian world seem rather to inflame the resentment and to stir up the fury, than to convince the judgment of their opponents; and to induce them to hold faster what they wish to make them give up. In so unequal and unsuccessful a contest, the advocates for truth will be inclined to despair, and to conclude that God has resolved that the dominion of error shall be perpetual. Let them not, however, forget the power and the promises of God, who has clearly foretold the overthrow and punishment of this anti-christian power. Babylon the great, with whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, by their alliances, shall certainly come into remembrance before God; to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath. She who hath shed the blood of saints and prophets

Digitized by Google

shall have blood to drink: for she is worthy: God will reward her as she hath rewarded others: yea, he will give unto her double for all her sins. Let Christians, therefore, persevere in prayer for this event, which God hath predicted, and commanded them to look for; and at this time especially let them not despair, when so many symptoms appear of its approach. Although accompanied with dreadful evils to a great part of the christian world, as the destruction of Jerusalem was to the Jews, it is still highly desirable. It will be an act of justice upon a cruel and persecuting power, which has deluged the world with blood: it will free the faithful servants of God from unjust oppression; open the way for the progress of truth, and be the æra of the improvement and happiness of a great portion of the human race. Let Christians then trust in God for the accomplishment of this event, and pray to him day and night for this purpose.

2. From the account here given of a Pharisee, we learn how ignorant men may be of themselves, and how necessary it is for us to take care that we do not fall into the like delusion. In his own opinion he has no vices or faults with which to reproach himself, and possesses many eminent virtues. He may behold himself with complacency, and approach his Maker with confidence, when it is evident to all eyes but his own that the excellencies for which he values himself are no more than external observances, of no intrinsic worth; that he has overlooked the first principle of genuine goodness, which is humility; and that he is far inferior in the scale of excellence to the tax-gatherer whom he contemns. Let us learn from this mistake to distrust all sentiments which tend to give us a favourable opinion of ourselves: it is highly probable that they are ill-founded; for there is no instance in which our judgments are so liable to be corrupted.

3. We see what sentiments become us in approaching the Divine Being; humility and contrition. In the parable they are put into the mouth of a Jewish

Digitized by Google

tax-gatherer: a man who belonged to a class of people that lay under a bad name, and who in general deserved it. But they are not less suitable to Christians of the present day, however excellent their characters, who, if they reflect upon the actions of their past lives, will see much to lament, and much that requires forgiveness. Many are the instances in which they have omitted their duty, or performed it negligently; many are the positive offences which they have committed against the laws of heaven, in regard to which they may with propriety adopt the language of the tax-gatherer, God be merciful to me a sinner!

Luke xviii. 15—30. corresponds with Matt. xix. 13—29.
— 31—34. - - - - - - - - xx. 17—19.
— 35. - - - - - - - — 29—.

Luke xix. 1—27.

1. And Jesus entered, and passed through Jericho.

2. And behold there was a man, named Zaccheus, which was the chief among the tax-gatherers; and he was rich.

He was the superior officer of the customs at Jericho, and in that situation had acquired wealth.

3. And he sought to see Jesus, who he was, and could not for the press, *rather*, "*from among the multitude*," because he was little of stature.

Having heard much of the fame of Jesus, he was very desirous to see his person; and as he could not gratify his curiosity in the streets of Jericho, he ran

Digitized by Google

before, and placed himself in a situation where there would be nothing to obstruct his sight and disappoint his curiosity.

4. And he ran before, and climbed up into a sycamore-tree to see him: for he was to pass that way; *rather*, "*by which*" *i. e. the sycamore-tree*, "*he was to pass.*"

5. And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up, and saw him, and said unto him, Zaccheus, make haste and come down: for to-day I must abide at thy house.

Jesus had never seen Zaccheus before; yet he calls him by his name, and discovers that he is well acquainted with his character: knowing that he would be a welcome guest, he invites himself to his house.

6. And he made haste, and came down, and received him joyfully.

He was rejoiced to be honoured with the presence of so distinguished a guest.

7. And when they saw it, they all murmured, saying that he was gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner.

If we suppose Zaccheus to have been a Jew, we must think that his countrymen were surprised and displeased to see Jesus, who was a prophet, and made pretensions to great sanctity, associate with a man who was infamous by his own vices, or those of persons of his profession. But if the term sinner has the same sense here which we have endeavoured to show that it has in other places, and signifies no more than a Gentile, the cause of their displeasure is obvious, as

Digitized by Google

well as the reason for Christ's conduct. They were offended to see Jesus going to the house of a Gentile, with whom no Jew would have familiar intercourse; and he was desirous of removing from the minds of his disciples the prejudices which they entertained against Gentiles, as we have seen him to be on former occasions, both by his discourses and actions; and to prepare the way for their admission into the christian church, which was to take place after his resurrection. This supposition appears the more probable, as it is not likely that Christ would take so much pains as he appears to have taken, to remove or soften the prejudices of the Jews against the publicans, if they were in general men of bad moral character.

8. And Zaccheus stood, and said unto the Lord, Behold, master, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, *or*, "*if I have wronged any man in any thing*," I restore him fourfold.

Before this visit which he received from Jesus, he became acquainted with his doctrine, particularly with the interesting doctrine of a future life, which filled his mind with so much joy, that as a testimony of his gratitude to the Divine Being, he resolved immediately to give half his substance to the poor; like the first christian converts, whom we read of in the book of Acts, ii. 45. who, we are told, sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. As Zaccheus would naturally reserve enough to himself to live upon, it is evident that what he had unjustly acquired could amount to only a very small part of his property; otherwise, the remainder would not have been sufficient for a subsistence. Some have calculated that had it amounted to an eighth, it must have stripped him of every thing. The inference which this consideration suggests is,

Digitized by Google

that in the preceding part of his life he had conducted himself with great equity in his profession, although he had acquired wealth in it: yet as he found that the laws of Christ required the strictest attention to justice, and as it was possible that he might have transgressed its sacred rules in a profession so exposed to temptation as that of a publican, he was willing to make the best atonement for his offences that he was able, by ample restitution. To restore fourfold for whatever had been fraudulently taken away, was a punishment inflicted in certain cases both by the Jewish and Roman law. Exod. xxii. 1.

9. And Jesus said unto him, *rather*, "*concerning him**," This day is salvation come to this house, for as much as he also is a son of Abraham.

To-day the belief of the gospel, the means of salvation, is come to this house: for this tax-gatherer, although no descendent of Abraham by birth, yet deserves to be reckoned among his children, on account of his ready faith.

10. For the son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.

These words are intended as a reply to the Jews, who murmured when they saw him going to visit a sinner, or a Gentile. This he justifies by saying that to visit such persons, was perfectly consistent with the design of his mission; inasmuch as he came to call men to repentance, and thus to save them from the fatal consequences of their sins.

11. And as they heard these things, he added, and spake a parable; because he was nigh to Jerusalem, and because they thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear.

* See Macknight in loc.

Digitized by Google

As Jesus was now at Jericho, which was at the distance of no more than 150 furlongs, or about 19 miles, from Jerusalem, and had declared his intention of going thither, most of his followers imagined that when he arrived at Jerusalem he would declare himself the Messiah, and set up the temporal kingdom which they had connected with that office. The ensuing parable, therefore, was intended partly for the instruction of those who entertained this expectation, by representing to them that Jesus would be rejected by the Jews, and that for this rejection they would be destroyed; and partly for the instruction of his followers in general. It contains instructions also of a more general nature, teaching that different degrees of improvement will be expected from men, according to the advantages which they enjoy. This part of the parable I have explained before, when it occurred in Matthew, and therefore it is unnecessary to say any thing more of it in this place.

12. He said therefore, A certain nobleman went into a far country, to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return.

In this part of the parable there is an allusion to the custom which prevailed in Judæa and some of the neighbouring countries, for the kings to go to Rome, to have their right to the throne confirmed by the emperor, and to receive his protection.

13. And he called his ten servants, and delivered them ten pounds, and said unto them, Occupy, *rather*, "*traffic*," 'till I come.

14. But his citizens hated him, and sent a message after him, saying, We will not have this man to reign over us.

Digitized by Google

This represents the conduct of the Jews towards Jesus, who was their rightful prince, and to whose authority they were bound to submit; and was intended to suggest to those who looked for his declaring himself the Messiah at Jerusalem, how his countrymen would behave towards him. The next part of the parable contains a different moral.

15. And it came to pass that when he was returned, having received the kingdom, then he commanded these servants to be called unto him, to whom he had given the money, that he might know how much every man had gained by trading.

16. Then came the first, saying, Master, thy pound hath gained ten pounds.

17. And he said unto him, Well, *or*, "*Well done*," *as it is in Matthew*, thou good servant: because thou hast been faithful in a very little, have thou authority over ten cities.

18. And the second came, saying, Master, thy pound hath gained five pounds.

19. And he said likewise unto him, Be thou also over five cities.

20. And another came, saying, Master, behold here is thy pound, which I have kept laid up in a napkin:

Digitized by Google

21. For I feared thee, because thou art an austere man; thou takest up that thou layedst not down, and reapest that thou didst not sow.

22. And he saith unto him, Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee, thou wicked servant; thou knewest that I was an austere man, taking up that I laid not down, and reaping that I did not sow;

23. Wherefore then gavest thou not my money into the bank, that, at my coming, I might have required mine own with usury?

24. And he said unto them that stood by, Take from him the pound, and give it to him that hath ten pounds.

25. And they said unto him, Master, he hath ten pounds.

26. For I say unto you, that unto every one which hath shall be given, and from him that hath not, even that he hath shall be taken from him.

This verse, which in its present form is not very intelligible, has been thus translated by Bishop Pearce: "For I say unto you that unto every one which hath gained shall be given, and from him that hath not gained, even that he hath received shall be taken away from him."

Digitized by Google

27. But those mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before me.

This verse contains the doom of the Jews, who were condemned to destruction, for refusing to submit to the authority of Christ.

REFLECTIONS.

1. The conduct of Zaccheus may teach those who have offended like him, by committing acts of injustice, in what manner they ought to show the sincerity of their repentance: not merely by confessing and lamenting their sin, either to God or man, although that be highly proper; but also by endeavouring, as far as they are able, to repair the injury. This is an indispensable requisite in genuine repentance. If men keep back the gains of iniquity, if they continue to enjoy the fruits of transgression, while they profess to condemn the unlawful deed, their sorrow cannot be sincere; they do not abhor it from their hearts. It is not the sin which they dislike, but the consequences which they fear will follow. Suffer not yourselves to be deceived with such false appearances, but proceed to give the only satisfactory proof of repentance. If you value the peace of your own minds; if you hope for forgiveness from God, and would avoid the doom of those who have wrought unrighteousness, restore to the lawful proprietor what you have taken from him by fraud, by violence or by any kind of injustice; and let the restitution be as public as the offence has been. Let not the fear of losing your credit deter you; for shame belongs to the unjust action and not to the restitution; *that* deserves commendation, and

Digitized by Google

will restore to you the good character which you had lost.

Let all men be careful that, in their endeavours to enrich themselves, they do not trespass upon the rights of others. Wealth, acquired in this way, will afford them no satisfaction. It will lie as a heavy burden upon their consciences, if they are not past all feeling, and be a constant source of grief and remorse, as long as they live. Better is a little gotten honestly, than great treasure by unjust means.

2. We see how the influence of Christianity disposes men to acts of liberality. No sooner is Zaccheus acquainted with the doctrine of Christ, than he gives half his goods to the poor. The precepts of Christ indeed did not require from him so great a sacrifice; yet such a voluntary act of benevolence is a noble proof of the little value which he placed upon temporal good things, in comparison with those spiritual benefits with which he was become acquainted; and of his gratitude to God for communicating them. It is also still true, that wherever the genuine principles of Christianity are felt, they teach men to regard with comparative indifference the riches of this world, and incline them to acts of liberality to the poor. Let Christians judge of the progress which they have made in the spirit of their religion, by this observation.

3. The story here told may teach us how liable we are to be deceived, in judging of individuals by the class or denomination of people to which they belong. A man who belonged to a body of people that lay under the worst name among the Jews, a tax-gatherer, and a chief in his profession, a heathen likewise, in all probability, discovers a greater readiness to receive the doctrine of Christ, and to act agreeably to its genuine principles, than the generality of the Jews. Even the young man who had kept the commandments from his youth, and whom Jesus, when he beheld, loved on ac-

Digitized by Google

count of his amiable disposition, showed himself inferior to this tax-gatherer: for when required to sell what he had, and give to the poor, he went away sorrowful. What this young man would not do, at the command of Christ, Zaccheus does voluntarily, and of his own accord. Hence let us learn to judge of men from their conduct as individuals, and not from the general character of those of the same rank or station with themselves.

4. From the sentence pronounced upon those who opposed the authority of Christ, Bring them hither, and slay them before my face, we may learn the danger of not suffering him to reign over us. Great were the calamities inflicted upon the Jewish nation, for refusing to receive their Messiah; and although other nations, who are not under the same particular Providence, may or may not suffer in the same manner, for a like behaviour, yet individuals must. If, from pride or the love of vice, they refuse to submit to the laws of Christ, the day is coming when they will feel the dreadful effects of his power. Let them beware, therefore, how they expose themselves to his vengeance. "Kiss the son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his anger is kindled but a little."

Luke xix. 29—38. corresponds with Matt. xxi. 1—9.

Luke xix. 41—44. xxi. 1—4. 20—24.

41. And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it;

The circumstances in which Jesus manifested this strong emotion of mind deserve our observation. It was at the time when the multitude, delighted with the many extraordinary miracles which he had performed, were paying him the respect usually reserved for princes, and those who had distinguished them-

Digitized by Google

selves by great exploits; placing him upon an ass; throwing their garments and branches of trees by the road side, and walking before him with acclamations of praise, saying, Blessed be the king that cometh in the name of the Lord: peace in Heaven and glory in the highest. In this situation, an ordinary mind would have dwelt with rapture upon the praises of the multitude, and have been wholly occupied with the present scene; but the comprehensive and feeling mind of Jesus, from the midst of this triumph, looks forward to the dreadful calamities which he sees to be approaching, and which, although now distant, affect him as strongly as if they were before his eyes. He cannot refrain from bursting into tears, and from breaking forth into expressions of sorrow, at the prospect of what is coming. The pleasure which he begins to feel at the respect paid to himself is quite lost, in a deep concern for what his countrymen are to suffer.

42. Saying, if thou hadst known, even thou, *rather*, "*O that thou hadst but known*," at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace;—but now they are hid from thy eyes.

The word Jerusalem is derived from two Hebrew words, which signify *they shall see peace, or prosperity.* To this origin of the name Jesus seems to allude, when he wishes that the inhabitants had known the things which belonged to their peace, or prosperity; intimating hereby, that their prosperity would have been secured, if they had received him as the Messiah: but their minds were so blinded with the notion of a temporal deliverer, that it was not possible for them to do this. He regrets their want of attention to their own interests, on the present occasion, more especially, as it would be attended with more fatal consequences than any of their former errors.

Digitized by Google

44. For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side,

These words plainly foretel the siege of Jerusalem; an event which took place under Vespasian, the Roman emperor, about forty years from this time. It has been supposed also that Jesus points out in these words the particular manner in which the siege should be conducted, by making a trench round the city; a prophecy which some think to have been fulfilled, when the Roman commander, after several defeats in attempting to take the city, determined to encompass it with a wall, which he completed in three days, with towers at proper distances, in which to place soldiers as garrisons. Others suppose that the words of Jesus were accomplished by the mounds of earth, which the Roman soldiers raised in different places round the city, the construction of which must necessarily occasion trenches. But the words may refer to nothing more than the siege, and were accomplished when the city was encompassed by an army, which encamped round it to besiege the place.

44. And shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another, because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation.

The best comment upon this verse are the words of the Jewish historian, Josephus, who, in his account of the siege, says: "And now, when no more were left to be slain, nor any more plunder remained for the soldiers, Cæsar gave orders that they should demolish to the foundation the whole city and the temple; leaving only three towers and a small portion of the wall; but as for all the rest of the circumference of the city, it was so thoroughly laid even with the

Digitized by Google

ground, by those who dug it up to the foundation, that there was nothing left to make those who came thither to believe it had ever been inhabited*." It appears also, from the same author, that the soldiers, who were left in garrison near the ruins, must have been the means of digging them to the foundation, from the hope of finding treasures of gold and silver under ground.

This calamity, Christ says, would come upon Jerusalem, because she knew not the time of her visitation; that is, because she knew not the time when the mercy of God visited her in the preaching of the gospel of Jesus.

In the next verses of this chapter, and throughout the whole of the twentieth, we have an account of things said and done by Jesus during his last visit to Jerusalem, which are related by Luke in nearly the same words as by Matthew. I pass on, therefore, to the beginning of the twenty-first chapter.

Luke xix. 45—.	corresponds with	Matt. xxi. 12, 13.
xx. 1—8.	- - - -	— 23—27.
— 9—19.	- - - - - - -	— 33—.
— 20—38.	- - - - - -	xxii. 15—33.
— 40—44.	- - - - - - -	—— 41—.
— 45—.	- - - - - -	xxiii. 5, 6, 14.

Luke xxi. 1—4.

1. And he looked up, and saw the rich men casting their gifts into the treasury.

This treasury was a chest, placed in some of the rooms of the temple, for receiving donations from the people for the repairs of that building; for defraying the expences of its offerings, and other services. The custom seems to have been first introduced by Jehoiada, the high-priest, 2 Kings, xii. 19. and to have been continued from that time.

* Bell. Jud. vii. 1.

Digitized by Google

2. And he saw also a certain poor widow, casting in thither two mites.

These, according to Mark, make a farthing; but this farthing was no more than a quarter of our coin of that name: by this it appears that the sum she had put in was very small.

3. And he said, Of a truth, I say unto you, that this poor widow hath cast in more than they all:

4. For all these have of their abundance cast into the offerings of God; but she, of her penury, hath cast in all the living that she had.

A charitable disposition is manifested not so much by the sum which men give, as by the proportion which it bears to their ability. Our Lord, therefore, justly observed, that this poor widow, who put into the chest no more than two mites, but all the money which she had, performed a greater act of charity in itself, and one more acceptable to the Divine Being, than those who gave more largely, but what was a smaller proportion of their substance.

Luke xxi. 5—20, corresponds with Matt. xxiv. 1—14. x. 18—22.

From some observations which were made to Jesus about the beauty of the temple and the richness of its gifts, he takes occasion to foretel the destruction of the temple and of the city; and in answer to the question which his disciples put to him respecting the time, he declares in the twentieth verse;

20. And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh.

Digitized by Google

21. Then let them which are in Judæa flee to the mountains; and let them which are in the midst of it, *that is, Jerusalem*, depart out; and let not them that are in the countries enter thereinto.

These expressions were all intended to point out how speedily the destruction of Jerusalem would follow its being surrounded with armies; and perhaps to induce Christians to take the first opportunity of escaping not only out of the city but likewise out of the country. Accordingly we are told that when Cestius, a Roman general, encamped around the city, before the grand siege by Titus, all the Christians, influenced probably by our Lord's cautions, forsook it, and hereby avoided the fate of their countrymen.

22. For these be the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled.

There is here a reference probably to what Moses and the prophets had foretold respecting the Jews, in case they rejected the commandments of God; and particularly to the prophecy of Daniel.

23. But woe unto them, "*alas for them*," *(an expression of pity, and not a denunciation of vengeance:)* who are with child, and for them that give suck in those days: for there shall be great distress in the land, and wrath upon this people.

The difficulty of fleeing from the country would be greatly increased to women in the situation here de-

Digitized by Google

scribed, and therefore they are objects of pity to Jesus: but their condition, however distressing, would not be so bad as that of those that remained, for whom the severity of divine judgments was reserved.

24. And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captives into all nations; and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.

The number of the Jews who perished at Jerusalem, during the siege, is calculated by Josephus*, at one million, one hundred thousand. Jerusalem was not naturally so populous; but the people had come up from all parts of the country, to observe the festival of the passover; so that the whole nation as it were was shut up in one place. Ninety-seven thousand of them were taken captives, great part of whom were sold for slaves. How exactly the prophecy has been fulfilled, in regard to the dispersion of the Jews, we need not the authority of Josephus to inform us: for it is a notorious fact, that people of this nation are to be found in almost every country under heaven.

The country of Judæa was sold to Gentiles, soon after the destruction of the city, and has continued in the hands of Gentiles to this day. By the phrase, "until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled," we are to understand till they are all converted to Christianity: after that time the Jews, it is intimated, shall possess their own land again. Thus this passage corresponds with what the apostle Paul says, that "blindness has happened in part to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be brought in."

* Bell. Jud. vi. 8.

Digitized by Google

REFLECTIONS.

1. In that portion of scripture which we have been reading, we behold an illustrious example of the humane disposition of our master. To weep at the distresses of our fellow men, when they are present with us, and their afflictions exhibited before our eyes; when the persons who suffer are our acquaintance and intimate friends, is justly esteemed a proof of a tender and benevolent heart: yet Jesus weeps at sufferings which he only sees in prophetic vision, at the distance of forty years; and these the sufferings not of friends, but of inveterate enemies, who were at this time plotting his death, and were soon to stain their hands with his blood. Had these distresses been before his eyes, and the persons who suffered them his nearest relatives and most intimate friends, he could hardly have felt more violent emotions than he appears to do upon the present occasion. So strongly was his mind actuated by the love of mankind, and so superior was his benevolence to that of ordinary persons! Let us endeavour to cultivate a like spirit of philanthropy, and learn not only to sympathise with the present objects of distress, but to feel for those likewise whom we see to be destined to suffer: let us learn to be affected at the calamities of our country, whenever we behold them approaching; especially let us learn to shed tears over those who madly expose themselves to the miseries of hell, by an obstinate perseverance in their sins. Such refined compassion will be the brightest ornament of our characters, and the most satisfactory proof of our proficiency in the spirit of Christ.

2. What we are here told of the liberality of the widow ought to encourage the poor to perform acts of beneficence; since it appears that the smallest gifts are acceptable, when they come from a rightly disposed

Digitized by Google

mind; yea, that they are more valuable in the judgment of reason and in the sight of God, than the splendid endowments of their rich neighbours, who are able to do more. Let them, therefore, not be ashamed of small donations for useful purposes, if they are the largest which they can afford. It is the disposition of the mind and the circumstances of the giver which God regards, and not the sum bestowed. When this is inconsiderable, but proceeds from a benevolent mind, it will procure for the bestower a larger reward than the offerings of many who have given more. The rich may also learn hence that their beneficence ought to bear a suitable proportion to their affluence; and that without this great gifts will be of little value. Let every man remember to give, whatever be his condition in life, according to his ability, and especially keep in mind that God loveth a cheerful giver.

3. In the exact accomplishment of these prophecies, we have a striking proof of the divine mission of Christ. They were delivered no less than forty years before the events which they predicted took place, and at a time when there was no appearance of such an extraordinary change. For although the Jews were uneasy under the Roman yoke in the time of Christ, yet had they not proceeded to open rebellion, and they were at this time in a very flourishing condition: nor was there any thing in their former sufferings, as recorded in the preceding periods of their history, which bore any resemblance to what now took place, so as to enable a person to conjecture the one from the other. Such an exact foresight of a distant event could proceed only from God, to whom the future is as well known as the present or past; and by being communicated to Jesus Christ was intended to increase our respect for him, and to establish our faith in those more distant events foretold by him, which have not yet taken place; such as the universal prevalence of his religion, a resurrection from the dead, a day of judgment and a state of retribution both for the just and the unjust. To this purpose then let us apply it. Let wicked men, in particular, remember that the evils

Digitized by Google

which he has denounced against them will as certainly take place, as those which he delivered against the Jews. There may be no appearance of such an event at present, any more than there was of the destruction of Jerusalem and the punishment of the Jews at the time when Christ foretold them; but he is as much authorized by God in one case as in the other. Let them now, therefore, while it is the accepted time, repent of their sins and reform their conduct, as the only way of escaping the judgments with which they are threatened.

Luke xxi. 25—. corresponds with Matt. xxiv. 29—.

xxii. 1—5. - - - - - - - xxvi. { 1—5. / 14—16.

—— 6—. - - - - - - - - —— 17—.

xxiii. 1—3. - - - - - - - xxvii. 1, 2.

Luke xxiii. 4—16. 27—34.

4. Then said Pilate to the chief priests and to the people, I find no fault in this man.

The charge brought against Jesus before Pilate was, that he assumed the authority of a king, in opposition to the claims of Cæsar. To this charge he had answered, by acknowledging that he was a king, but adding an explanation which removed every thing that was offensive in the claim, saying, that his kingdom was not of this world, being of a spiritual and not of a civil nature. With this explanation Pilate was satisfied, as he saw no evidence of any design to assume temporal power.

5. And they were the more fierce, saying, He stirreth up the people, teaching throughout all Jewry, beginning from Galilee, to this place.

Digitized by Google

Having failed to establish their first charge, they produce another, accusing him of teaching new opinions, contrary to the generally received notions, and tending to disturb the public tranquillity, of which the Roman governor was the guardian: they hoped, therefore, that on this account he would deem him a criminal worthy of punishment.

6. When Pilate heard of Galilee, he asked whether the man were a Galilean.

7. And as soon as he knew that he belonged unto Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him to Herod; who himself was also at Jerusalem at that time.

As this was the time of keeping the passover, Herod, as a Jew, came to Jerusalem, like the rest of his countrymen, to observe the feast. As Pilate was plainly averse to condemn Jesus, he was probably glad of an opportunity of sending him to another judge, who, by passing sentence upon the accused, might save him from the pain of putting to death an innocent person, in compliance with the earnest solicitations of the Jews; or keep him from giving them offence by an acquittal. He might also be desirous of recovering the friendship of Herod, which, it seems, he had lost; perhaps by some interference with his jurisdiction.

8. And when Herod saw Jesus, he was exceeding glad: for he was desirous to see him of a long time, because he had heard many things of him; and he hoped to have seen some miracle done by him.

9. Then he questioned with him in

Digitized by Google

many words; "*asked him many questions*;" but he answered him nothing.

Christ, knowing that his miraculous powers were given him as evidences of a divine mission, did not chuse to display them where they would not answer this purpose, and could only serve to gratify the curiosity of a wicked tyrant and his profligate court: for the like reason he did not chuse to answer questions, which were proposed not with a desire of information, but to ensnare or expose him.

10. And the chief priests and Scribes stood, and vehemently accused him.

What charges they brought against him we are not told; but they were probably the same as when he stood at the bar of Pilate; namely, that he assumed kingly power, or made mens' minds uneasy by teaching new doctrines.

11. And Herod, with his men of war, "*his soldiers*," set him at nought, "*treated him contemptuously*;" and mocked him, and arrayed him in a gorgeous robe, *rather*, "*in a white robe*;" and sent him again to Pilate.

The Jewish nobles are said to have worn white robes, whereas the Roman wore purple; hence proceeded the different manner in which Jesus was clothed by the soldiers of Herod and of Pilate. The former, in derision of his claims to kingly power, dressed him in white; the latter, in purple. From this circumstance it is evident, though not expressly mentioned in the history, that he was accused of the same offence before Herod as before Pilate, and that that prince thought that his claims merited contempt rather than severe punishment.

Digitized by Google

12. And the same day Pilate and Herod were made friends together: for before they were at enmity between themselves.

The attention shown by Pilate to Herod, in sending to him a criminal for judgment, who was brought before himself, because he belonged to the jurisdiction of the other, was the means of their reconciliation, and of removing the enmity which before subsisted between them, from whatever cause it proceeded. Pilate now makes an attempt, for the second time, to release Jesus, in which he promised himself more success than before; inasmuch as his own opinion of the innocence of Jesus was confirmed by the conduct of Herod, who had sent him back uncondemned. But no favourable opinion of his judge concerning him will allay the enmity of his persecutors.

13. And Pilate, when he had called together the chief priests and the rulers and the people,

14. Said unto them, Ye have brought this man unto me as one that perverteth the people, "*rendereth them discontented*," and behold I, having examined him, *rather*, "*having examined the witnesses*," before you, have found no fault in this man, touching those things whereof ye accuse him:

15. No, nor yet Herod: for I sent you unto him; and lo nothing worthy of death is done unto him, *or* "*by him*," *that is, by Herod.*

Digitized by Google

The meaning of these words is, that it appears by Herod's behaviour, in the case of this man, that he does not believe him worthy of death.

16. I will therefore chastise him and release him.

He was willing so far to humour his enemies, as to scourge him, although he thought him innocent; but this light punishment would not satisfy the malice of his enemies. The more inclined Pilate appeared to release him, the more importunate they were in their clamours to have him put to death; 'till at length their cries prevailed over the feeble virtue of the governor, and induced him to give his consent to that which in his heart he disapproved. It was on the road to the place of crucifixion that the events next related took place.

Luke xxiii. 17—25. corresponds with Matt. xxvii. 15—18. 20—26. 32.

---

27. And there followed him a great multitude of people, and of women also, which bewailed and lamented him.

With the cross behind him and Calvary before him, we might suppose that Christ would be wholly occupied with his approaching sufferings, and that nothing else could find place in his mind. Yet we perceive that in these circumstances, as before, when approaching Jerusalem, he is more affected with the prospect of the calamities coming upon his countrymen than with those coming upon himself.

28. But Jesus, turning unto them, said, Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves and your children.

Digitized by Google

By telling them to weep not so much for him as for themselves, he strongly intimates that the sufferings about to come upon them were much more dreadful than would fall upon himself: for where men have much to fear for themselves, it usually swallows up all concern for other persons.

29. For behold the days are coming, in the which they shall say, Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bare, and the paps that never gave suck.

The calamities which mothers shall see befal their children shall be so great, that they shall wish that they had never been born, and shall esteem those happy who never had any.

30. Then shall they begin to say to the mountains, Fall on us; and to the hills, Cover us.

Although to have the mountains and rocks fall upon you are some of the greatest calamities which can overtake you, yet this shall be deemed preferable to those calamities which you have to expect, from falling into the hands of your enemies. These expressions are borrowed from Hosea, x. 8.

31. For if they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?

These words have been thus paraphrased. "If divine Providence, for wise ends, permits this suffering to befal me, who am an innocent person; so that there is no more apparent propriety in my being abandoned to this fate than in green wood being employed for fuel; what will be done to you, whose vices render you as ripe for destruction as dry wood is fit for burning*?"

* Priestley's Harmony.

Digitized by Google

32. And there were also two other malefactors, *rather*, "*two others who were malefactors*," led with him to be put to death.

33. And when they were come to the place which is called Calvary, *i. e. the place of a skull*, there they crucified him, and the malefactors; one on the right hand and the other on the left.

As if his crime had been more enormous than those of the others, they allot him the distinction of being placed between them.

34. Then said Jesus, Father forgive them: for they know not what they do.

This prayer seems to have been formed, just after they had nailed him to the cross, and placed him between the two malefactors; while his body was writhing with the pain which had just been inflicted, in the cruel operation of crucifixion.

And they parted his raiment, and cast lots.

REFLECTIONS.

1. That portion of sacred history which we have been reading affords us ground to admire the conduct of divine Providence, in permitting Christ to appear before so many tribunals: for as nothing could be proved against him, this furnishes us with the stronger evidence of his innocence. If he had had but one trial, it might have been supposed that his judges were, in some unaccountable way, prejudiced in his

Digitized by Google

favour, and partial to him. But this does not appear likely, when he is called before several, in different places, and those entire strangers to him. From the Jewish council, where he was first tried, he is carried before Pilate; and from him to Herod; but no where does there appear any proof of his being guilty of any crime: on the contrary, the governor acknowledges that he can find no fault in him, and the Jewish Tetrarch shows plainly by his conduct that he entertained the same opinion. The Jewish council indeed condemned him for blasphemy, but it was only for saying that he was the son of God or the Messiah; a character to which his miracles and doctrines prove him to have had the best claim. What strengthens the force of this argument, derived from the acknowledgment of his judges, is that it proceeded entirely from the conviction of their own minds, unassisted by the aid of eloquence, either on the part of Jesus the person accused, or of any friend who might stand up in his defence: for Jesus declined to plead his own cause, and no one appeared to plead for him; while his persecutors were the Jewish priests and senators, the principal persons in the state, and men of the first rank for ability and eloquence. Such a testimony to his innocence as we have seen Pilate and Herod make in these circumstances could proceed from nothing but the absence of guilt. Thus we see in this instance, as in many other cases, how Providence brings good out of evil, and over-rules the malice of men to defeat their purposes. By bringing Jesus to trial before a court of justice, and by procuring his condemnation, his enemies hoped to impeach his character, and for ever discredit his pretensions; but this method which they pursued has proved the means of establishing his innocence, beyond all future doubt and controversy.

2. The conduct of Jesus in going to the place of execution, and his behaviour while he was there, illustrate the extraordinary excellence of his character. While walking to Calvary, surrounded with all the horrid apparatus of crucifixion, and but a few moments before he was to submit to this dreadful punishment,

Digitized by Google

we find his mind more distressed at the idea of the sufferings of others than in the prospect of his own. What benevolence and magnanimity! Who has ever exceeded or even equalled him in the exercise of these virtues! Nothing can be found superior to this conduct, except it be his own behaviour upon the cross, in entreating God to forgive his enemies. This was practising the most difficult of all virtues, in the most difficult circumstances; not when he lived at ease; when the malicious purposes of his enemies had been defeated, and they had terminated in his own triumph; but at the very moment when their schemes against him had succeeded; when they were glorying in their success, and when he himself was in an agony of pain from the wounds which they had just inflicted. At this trying period he prays that they may be forgiven, which shows that all resentment against them had subsided in his breast, and that he wished them good for the evil which they had done to him. After this, let no one say that this virtue is impracticable, or complain of the difficulty which attends it. Christ our master has performed it, in more painful circumstances than any in which we are likely to be placed.

3. Let wicked men remember the observation of Christ, as he was going to suffer: "If they do these things in the green tree, what shall be done in the dry?" If God permits such dreadful sufferings to befal the virtuous and good, and the most excellent of his servants, what may there not be reserved for those of an opposite character? Is there any punishment too great for them to merit, or for his justice to inflict? Let them seriously consider this, and not heedlessly expose themselves to the effects of his displeasure. In the sufferings of good men they may see a pledge of what will come upon others.

Luke xxiii. 35—38. corresponds with Matt. xxvii. 37—43.

Digitized by Google

Luke xxiii. 39—43.

39. And one of the malefactors which were hanging, *that is, upon the cross*, railed on him, saying, If thou be the Christ, save thyself and us.

It is the opinion of Bishop Pearce that the two men who were crucified with Jesus, and who are here called malefactors, and, in the parallel passage in Matthew, thieves, were not such persons as we usually understand by these terms, that is, either house-breakers or highwaymen, persons who rob and plunder all they meet; but of that sort of Jews who took up arms upon the principle that it was not lawful to pay tribute to Cæsar, and plundered the Romans, in return for the tribute which they exacted; and that these men, when once engaged in these dangerous attempts, sometimes did the same thing to their countrymen, being compelled to do it for support, contrary to their wishes and intentions. Josephus calls this class of men by the same name which the evangelists have given to these malefactors, that is, robbers; although it is evident that they might differ much in character from those who usually bear that denomination. This opinion may perhaps derive some confirmation from the language of one of the malefactors which I have just read. The Roman soldiers had ridiculed the pretensions of Jesus to kingly power, by saying, If thou be the king of the Jews, save thyself. In this mockery one of the malefactors joined, adding such sentiments as his own situation suggested: for he said, If thou be the Christ save thyself and us; that is, If thou art the Messiah, and appointed by God to deliver the Jews from the Roman yoke, save thyself from thy present situation, and us, who like thee are suffering for our

Digitized by Google

attempts to throw off that yoke. There is a peculiar propriety in his language, although spoken by way of ridicule, when considered in this connection: for the favour which he asks is, as he pretends, for fellow-sufferers in the same cause; whereas if both these men were common thieves, there was no reason for supposing that the Jewish Messiah, although a temporal deliverer according to their ideas, would show particular favour to that class of men.

The supposition now made respecting the character and views of this man, may likewise derive confirmation from observing that Barabbas, whom the Jews requested to have spared instead of Jesus, is called by the evangelist John a robber; but by Luke he is said to be cast into prison for sedition and murder. In this sedition and murder these two men were probably his accomplices.

40. But the other, answering, rebuked him, saying, Dost thou not fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation?

Art thou not afraid to offend God, before whose tribunal thou must shortly appear, by committing a fresh crime, in addition to that which thou hast committed already, by insulting an innocent person and a divine messenger?

Matthew and Mark represent the two malefactors as joining in the insulting language, although Luke confines it to one of them. The former says, "The thieves also who were crucified with him cast the same in his teeth." And Mark says, "And they that were crucified with him reviled him." But as Luke is so much more particular in his narrative than the other two evangelists, it is probable that his account is the most accurate. So far, however, is this disagreement from invalidating the testimony of the evangelists, that it renders the leading facts of their history still more credible; as it proves that they did not write in concert; and consequently that the general agreement

Digitized by Google

subsisting in their several accounts is owing not to artful contrivance, but to the truth of the facts which they have related.

41. And we, indeed, justly: for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this man hath done nothing amiss.

This malefactor, although he took up arms upon what he considered as good principles, and with just intentions, yet might be sensible that he had been guilty of many unjustifiable excesses, which deservedly brought upon him the punishment of death, and for which he was now sincerely sorry. He discovers a knowledge of the life and character of Jesus, which is hardly consistent with his being a common robber; but which we might very well expect from a man of a religious turn of mind, who had taken up arms upon mistaken principles respecting the sovereignty and independence of the Jewish nation. It is possible that he had heard the discourses or seen some of the miracles of Jesus, before he betook himself to that way of life for which he now suffered. Without some supposition of this kind, it will be difficult to account for that faith in him as the Messiah which he discovers in the next verse; as well as for the high opinion which he appears to entertain of him in this.

42. And he said unto Jesus, Lord, "*master*," remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom, *or*, "*when thou comest to thy kingdom.*"

By this language it appears that this Jew believed Jesus to be the Messiah, and as all the Jews, not excepting the disciples of Jesus, even to the very close of his ministry, regarded the Messiah as a temporal deliverer, this man must have entertained the same opinion with the rest of his countrymen. By Christ's coming into or to his kingdom, he must mean his obtaining that temporal authority with which it was supposed to

Digitized by Google

he the intention of Providence to invest him. By desiring to be remembered at that time, it would appear as if he thought that God would immediately interpose, to deliver him from the hands of his enemies, and to bestow upon him this authority: for it can hardly be supposed that he believed that Christ, after being put to death, would rise to life again; an event which was not looked for even by the apostles. As he was conscious of being actuated by good intentions in his past conduct, although guilty of some criminal excesses, of which, however, he now repented, he might with propriety hope for some marks of the favour of Christ; and Christ might with propriety grant them.

43. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise.

In answer to the request of the penitent malefactor, Christ promises that he should be in the same state with himself on that day. In order, therefore, to determine where this man was to be, we have only to consider where Christ was. Now it is evident from the history that Christ died on that day, and was laid in the grave; yet he lay there under the smiles of heaven, and with the certainty of a resurrection. The meaning of Christ then, as illustrated by fact, could be no more than that he should go to the state of the righteous dead; to pious men of former ages, where he should lie in hope of a resurrection. Agreeably to this notion it has been observed that according to the opinion of the Jews, paradise was that part of the habitation of the dead which was assigned to righteous and good men. This Jesus might well promise to him, because he discerned in him some promising dispositions, and was convinced, from what he now observed, and from the miraculous knowledge which he had of his character, that the conduct for which he was suffering was to be ascribed rather to the erroneousness of his principles than to the depravity of his heart. That Christ could not mean to promise this man that he should be with him that day in heaven,

Digitized by Google

is evident hence—that Christ did not go thither that day himself; for it was some time after his resurrection before he ascended into heaven. That the soul of Christ, whether it were that of a man or a superangelic spirit, quitted his body at his death, ascended into heaven, the residence of the blessed, continued there three days, and descended from heaven again to reanimate his body, is a supposition which cannot be admitted without some evidence, of which this passage affords none.

Some have supposed that Christ, on this occasion, intended to say, To-day, thou art certain of a place with me in heaven: it is a thing already done and determined; the words to-day being constantly used of any matter then fixed, settled or declared, though not to commence till some months or even ages after. So, "*In the day thou eatest thereof* thou shalt surely die." "Hear, O Israel, thou art to pass over Jordan *this day*;" although neither of these events took place till some time afterwards. In these places, and several others which might be produced, *this day* and *to-day* cannot be understood to mean instantly, or the day on which the words were spoken; but to refer generally to a future time not far distant.

Having thus given both interpretations, I must leave the reader to determine which is the more likely to be true. That the words of Christ were intended to convey some important meaning, whatever it was, is evident from his prefacing them with saying, Verily I say unto thee; a form of expression which is never used but when he intended to announce something important.

REFLECTIONS.

1. From the passage which has now been explained, it has been inferred, that however wicked men may

Digitized by Google

have been in the preceding part of their lives, yet, if they repent of their sins when they come to die, although that repentance take place but a few hours before their departure out of life, they have good ground to hope for the divine favour and forgiveness, and for admission into heaven. But such a conclusion supposes that men may be prepared for heaven instantaneously, by the immediate agency of the Divine Being; and that he may do this, after the ordinary methods of his Providence have proved ineffectual for the reformation of sinners, which is contrary to the whole tenor of the scriptures, which teach us that without holiness no one shall see the Lord, and that this holiness, which is to consist in certain pious and virtuous dispositions, is to be acquired not by the agency of another, but by every man's own exertions; and which likewise teach us that if men will not become good in this manner, no other means will be employed by the Divine Being. This conclusion is also contrary to all the principles of human nature, which show that no man can become good at once, and that habits which have been a long time in forming, require a proportionate time to be overcome and to have contrary habits introduced. This is a conclusion, therefore, which cannot be admitted upon the authority of a single passage of scripture, unless the evidence arising from it be very clear and unexceptionable. But no such unexceptionable evidence appears in the present instance. On the contrary, there appears great reason to suppose that this man was a religious Jew, and that he was extremely zealous for preserving the institutions and customs of his religion; and that it was this zeal which hurried him into the excesses for which he is now sorry, but for which he must suffer the punishment of the laws. So that he became worthy of the hopes which Christ communicated to him when he was dying, not by his present confession only, but by his former character.

Let no one, therefore, take encouragement from this instance to go on in sinful practices, from the hope that he shall be able to repent, and to make his peace with

Digitized by Google

God, in his last moments. Whoever trusts to such expectations, relies upon that for which he has no authority from scripture, and which cannot take place without a miracle; and a miracle too in favour of a presumptuous offender, and performed in direct opposition to every other part of the divine proceedings.

2. The attention shown by Christ to this malefactor affords us a fresh proof of the humanity of his temper. He who in his life-time discovered so much readiness to listen to the requests and to relieve the distresses of the miserable, preserves the same temper to the very last moment of life, even when he was, as it were, in the agonies of death; which shows that it was not an assumed character but the natural disposition of his mind. If he cannot promise him any favour in a temporal kingdom, he assures him of what was of more consequence to a dying man, and might well enable him to resign himself into the hand of death in peace, an interest in that everlasting kingdom which is to be established beyond the grave.

Let it be remembered, however, that the custom of ministers of religion visiting notorious criminals or open violators of the law of God, when they are about to die, absolving them from their sins, or giving them assurances of pardon and salvation upon the profession of repentance, derives no countenance from this example: for Christ possessed a knowledge of the hearts and characters of men, which it would be the highest presumption in the ordinary ministers of religion to pretend to: he might therefore justly give assurances, where no other person can dare to offer any without assuming divine powers. Besides, it is pretty clear that the person to whom they were given in the present instance, was not a man who had led an abandoned life to this time, and who never thought of God or religion till the last moment, as is the case with those of whom we are here speaking; but one of upright intentions, and, upon the whole, of a good cha-

Digitized by Google

racter, although not without blemishes; to such a man hope might be exhibited, but not to the other.

I shall conclude with observing, that nothing can have a more pernicious tendency to encourage men in the practice of sin, than the idea that a few confessions on their part, or a few prayers on the part of a minister of religion, or of any Christian friend, made just at the approach of death, are sufficient to prepare them for heaven.

Luke xxiii 44. corresponds with Matt. xxvii. 45—61.
xxiv. 1—12. - - - - - xxviii. 1— 9.

Luke xxiv. 13—35.

13. And behold two of them, *of his disciples*, went that same day to a village called Emmaus, which was from Jerusalem about three-score furlongs; *seven miles and a half.*

These two persons are mentioned as part of some body of men, which could not be the apostles: for none of them was called Cleophas; but they must be a part of those who, after the mention of the eleven in verse the ninth, are called "the rest." The women, we are informed, who had been at the sepulchre, and had seen the angels, told these things unto the eleven, and "to all the rest." To this party of disciples, who were with the eleven, these two belonged.

14. And they talked together of all these things which had happened.

15. And it came to pass that while they communed together, and rea-

Digitized by Google

soned, Jesus himself drew near, and went with them.

16. But their eyes were holden that they should not know him.

The evangelist does not mean that their eyes were under any miraculous influence, to prevent them from knowing him; but only that they were hindered from attending to those circumstances which would have speedily discovered their master to them. Mark tells us, xvi. 12, that after he appeared to Mary Magdalene, who, on account of his dress, probably, took him for the gardener, he appeared in another form, referring to the present occasion, and meaning, most likely, that he appeared in another dress. This circumstance, connected with the ideas entertained by these two disciples that Jesus was still dead, will account for their not knowing him sooner.

17. And he said unto them, What manner of communications are these that ye have one to another, as ye walk, and are sad?

Perceiving that they did not recollect his person, he assumed the character of a stranger, and took an opportunity, under that character, of communicating some useful instruction to them; which, if they had known that he was Jesus, they would not have been able to attend to from surprise and astonishment to see him risen from the dead. Their earnest discourse and anxious looks might well justify even a stranger in putting to them this question.

18. And the one of them, whose name was Cleophas, answering, said unto him, Art thou only a stranger in Jerusalem, and hast not known the things which are come to pass there in these days?

Digitized by Google

These words may be better rendered, Art thou alone so great a stranger in Jerusalem as not to know the things which are come to pass there in these days? This implies that the transactions were so public and extraordinary, as to attract the notice of strangers, and that it was matter of surprise that any one should be ignorant of them.

19. And he said unto them, What things? And they said unto him, Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, which was a prophet mighty in deed and word, *i. e. in miracles and doctrine,* before God and all the people;

A teacher from God, not of an ordinary character, but eminent in the opinion of the people in general, both for the number of his miracles and the excellence of his discourses. We see hence that these two disciples had no other notion of Jesus than that of a prophet, one of the human race, sent and commissioned by God.

20. And how the chief priests and our rulers delivered him to be condemned to death; and have crucified him.

What was done at their desire is justly attributed to them.

21. But we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel, *or,* "*who was about to deliver Israel;*" and beside all this, to-day is the third day since these things were done.

The deliverance which these disciples expected by means of Jesus, was a deliverance from the Roman yoke, by his setting up a temporal kingdom: but

Digitized by Google

these hopes were overturned by his crucifixion and death; especially as it was now three days since that event; by which time they conjectured, from what was said by Christ while he was living, that something might arise to revive their expectations; they had now therefore given up the matter in despair.

22. Yea and certain women also, *rather*, "*moreover certain women*," of our company made us astonished, which were early at the sepulchre;

23. And when they found not his body they came, saying that they had also seen, *or*, "*they came telling it; and that they had seen*;" a vision, "*an appearance*," of angels, which said that he was alive.

Two things were reported by the women—that they found not the body, and that they had seen angels, which said that he was alive.

24. And certain of them which were with us, *i. e. Peter and John*, went to the sepulchre, and found it even so as the women had said; but, *rather*, "*and*," him they saw not.

These two disciples found the body missing, as the women had related, and did not, any more than they, see Jesus.

25. Then he said unto them, O fools, *or*, "*Inconsiderate persons*," and slow of heart, *or*, "*backward*," to believe all that the prophets have spoken.

Digitized by Google

He here reproaches them for their backwardness to believe the declarations of the prophets, as he had often reproached his disciples before for their want of faith in God; with this difference only, that what he now says is in the character of a stranger, whereas the censure pronounced before came from him as their master. The predictions which foretold the sufferings of Christ, were so numerous and clear, as justly to expose those to the charge of dulness who could not perceive them.

26. Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?

The glory here spoken of, and called the glory of Christ, is not that which he now enjoys in heaven, but the glory arising from the success of his doctrine, and from the establishment of a kingdom in the world governed by his laws. This is often referred to by the prophets, as the consequence of his sufferings; and Christ immediately proceeds to point out to these disciples how his sufferings had been foretold, and the glory which should follow them. This would prepare their minds for the discovery which he was about to make of himself to them.

27. And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them, in all the scriptures, the things concerning himself.

This verse, if divested of the peculiarities of the Greek language, in which it is written, would run thus; "And he began with Moses, and went on through all the scriptures, expounding from him and all the prophets the things concerning himself. See examples of the like mode of speaking, Luke xxiii. 5. John viii. 9. Acts i. 22. What particular passages of the books of Moses, or of the prophets, Christ expounded to these disciples, as the evangelist has not mentioned them, can be matter only of conjecture, and

Digitized by Google

different persons will fix upon different parts of these writings, according to the system of religious faith which they have embraced; but all, I apprehend, will agree that the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah was one of those portions of scripture which underwent the explanation of Christ on this occasion.

28. And they drew nigh unto the village whither they went, and he made as though he would have gone farther.

He led them to think that he meant to leave them, by going forward upon the road, or some other motion, and not by using any words which intimated such an intention. He still acted the part of a stranger and traveller, who might have business at a distance.

29. But they constrained him, "*persuaded him;*" saying, Abide with us: for it is towards evening, and the day is far spent.

Being delighted with the satisfactory manner in which he had expounded the scriptures, on a very interesting subject, they wished to enjoy the company of this stranger longer, and he appeared willing to comply.

And he went in to tarry with them.

30. And it came to pass, as he sat at meat with them, he took bread, and blessed it; *rather*, "*gave thanks*," *that is, to God*, and brake, and gave to them.

As Jesus appeared on this occasion in the character of a common Jew, it seems probable that, in giving thanks before a meal, he only conformed to a custom which generally prevailed amongst religious men of that nation; but there might be something in his

Digitized by Google

manner or language upon this occasion, which reminded them of their master, and, when connected with his appearance and other circumstances, confirmed them in the opinion that it was he.

31. And their eyes were opened,

Not by the withdrawing of any miraculous influence, by which they were before closed; but by the circumstances just mentioned; in the same manner as before their eyes were held, or shut, by the unusual form or dress in which he appeared.

And they knew him, and he vanished out of their sight.

These words seem to imply that Jesus suddenly disappeared, as angels are said to disappear in the Old Testament, or as apparitions are supposed to do; but the word in the original expresses no more than that he simply disappeared from before them, which might take place by his suddenly withdrawing himself.

32. And they said one unto another, Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?

In these words they express, in natural language, the glow of pleasure and satisfaction which they both felt, while Jesus explained to them the prophecies, and showed how consistent they were with the events which had lately taken place, and which had filled their minds with dejection and despair.

33. And they rose up the same hour, "*immediately*," and returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven gathered together and them that were with them,

Digitized by Google

34. Saying, The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon.

Although Jerusalem was at the distance of nearly eight miles from Emmaus, and it was already evening, they set out immediately to return thither, that they might communicate the joyful information that Jesus was risen from the dead: but their intelligence was anticipated by what the apostles had heard from another quarter; Simon Peter having informed them that he had seen him. On what occasion this took place we are not told. Paul, in the fifteenth chapter of the first epistle to the Corinthians, speaks of it as the first appearance made by Jesus to any one, although John tells us that Mary Magdalene enjoyed that honour.

35. And they told what things were done in the way, and how he was known of them in breaking of bread.

REFLECTIONS.

1. We may observe that the story here told with so much simplicity furnishes us with fresh proof of the certainty of Christ's resurrection: for there is no other method of accounting for the circumstances here related. We find Jesus, who had undergone the dreadful operation of crucifixion, by having his hands and feet pierced with large nails, and in addition to this had had his side laid open by a spear, so that there came out blood and water, on the Friday, so far recovered from his wounds, on the following Sunday, as to walk eight miles from Jerusalem, in company with persons in perfect health, and to return to the city the same evening. Let any one account for this if he can, without admitting the truth of his resurrection from

Digitized by Google

the dead, and of his wounds being healed in a miraculous manner. Could we suppose that Jesus, by any means, might have been taken down from the cross before he was really dead, yet his wounds would never have permitted him to walk abroad on the third day; on the contrary, the inflammation, which always succeeds, would render it certainly more impossible for him to walk at that time than on the day on which they were first inflicted. This, and a thousand other circumstances, conspire to remove all doubt respecting this event, and to assure us that the Lord is risen indeed. The circumstance of his remaining concealed from his disciples while he talked with them, is so far from exciting doubts respecting the identity of his person, that it tends more strongly to prove that it was Jesus; for it shows that he was not expected or looked for by them at this time, and that the marks by which they at last recollected him were very satisfactory, inasmuch as they were sufficient to point him out under a disguise.

2. The sufferings of Christ are so far from being inconsistent with his pretensions as the Messiah, that they are a confirmation of his claim to that character: for they were clearly foretold in the writings of the prophets. We are there informed that this great personage should be despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; that he should be cut off from the land of the living; that he should make his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death: for it pleased the Lord to bruise him and to put him to grief. How well these particulars corresponded with the events recorded in the history of Christ it is unnecessary to show; those must well deserve reproach who cannot discern the resemblance.

3. How happy were these two disciples in having Christ to expound the scriptures to them! How easily would he unravel the greatest difficulties! What light would not he throw upon the darkest passages! Doubt and obscurity would flee before him, as the shades of night flee before the returning day. Well might their heart glow with secret delight at the

Digitized by Google

clear discoveries and powerful convictions which accompanied his words!

The same service which Christ performed for Cleophas and his companion is still necessary for many of his disciples, who cannot understand the scriptures unless they are expounded to them. Whatever might be the perspicuity of these writings, when first formed, the eighteen centuries which have elapsed since that time have produced a great change in the state of the world, and in the language and manners of mankind, so as to render many expressions which were then perfectly intelligible, at this time difficult to be understood, especially by the common people, who have not time for acquiring that knowledge which is requisite to prepare them for the successful explication of these sacred writings. This shows the necessity of having some assistance, which those who need it should thankfully accept and labour to improve.

Luke xxiv. 36. to the end.

36. And as they thus spake Jesus himself stood in the midst of them, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you.

This is the same appearance to his disciples of which we have an account in the evangelist John, xx. 19, who tells us that he came among them when the doors were shut; which he might do by opening them with his own hand, but unperceived by them, in the earnestness of their conversation; or by means of his miraculous power, in the same manner as the prison-doors were opened for Peter when confined. This will account for the consternation with which they were struck at seeing him, which is mentioned in the next verse. "Peace be unto you," was the common form of salutation among the Jews, and had no particular meaning in this place.

Digitized by Google

37. But they were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they had seen, *rather*, "*were seeing*," a spirit.

The apostles, being Jews, had the common errors and prejudices of their countrymen, of which number this was one, that the souls of the dead did sometimes wander abroad, covered with the same corporeal form, although wholly unsubstantial, which they had while living. Of their entertaining this opinion we have already seen a proof in Matthew, xiv. 26, where we find them terrified with seeing Jesus walking upon the water, because they supposed that he had been a spirit, or ghost; and we have a fresh instance of it upon the present occasion, when they suppose that the appearance of Jesus was a ghost; an idea which they were probably more ready to embrace, on account of the sudden and unexpected manner in which he appeared among them.

38. And he said unto them, Why are ye troubled, and why do thoughts, *such mistaken thoughts*, arise in your hearts?

39. Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself, handle me, and see: for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have.

40. And when he had thus spoken he showed them his hands and his feet.

There were three things by which Christ proposed to prove that he was no apparition; the sight, the touch and his eating meat. The two first are mentioned in the preceding verses: for he desired them to look attentively at him, and particularly at the prints of the nails in his hands and his feet, which had still

Digitized by Google

left scars where the wounds had been, and proved him to have been lately crucified; and likewise to feel and handle him, to satisfy themselves that he was a substantial body, and not an airy substance, as a spirit was supposed to be. This language of Christ gives no countenance to the popular error respecting the existence or nature of what are called spirits, or ghosts: but he reasons with his apostles upon their own principles, and proves to them that, according to their own conceptions, he could not be a spirit, since he had flesh and bones. He next suggests to them a third test, by which they might remove their uncertainty whether he was a real person or a phantom, by asking for some meat, and eating it in their presence.

41. And while they yet believed not for joy, and wondered,

This reason assigned for the doubts of the disciples, is very natural and just: for what men ardently wish for they are readily disposed to believe. Prudent men, therefore, when they hear good news, are disposed to receive it with caution, fearing that their judgment may be biassed by their wishes. This was the state of mind of these disciples at this time; the resurrection of their master from the dead they felt to be so extraordinary an event, that they were afraid to trust the evidence of their senses upon the subject, and suspended their judgment.

He said unto them, Have ye here any meat?

42. And they gave him a piece of a broiled fish and of an honey-comb;

43. And he took it, and did eat before them.

It is observable that John the evangelist connects these circumstances with the appearance of Christ to his disciples at the sea of Tiberias, which is probably the proper place for them; whereas Luke connects

Digitized by Google

them with his first appearance to the eleven, on the first day of the week.

44. And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the law of Moses and in the Prophets and in the Psalms concerning me.

45. Then opened he their understanding, *by explanation and not miraculously*, **that they might understand the scriptures.**

He performed the same office for the eleven which he had the same evening performed for the two who went to Emmaus, and which the one needed as well as the other: for although he had often foretold his own death, and reminded them of what was said upon the subject in the scriptures, yet they never expected such an event.

46. And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead on the third day,

Although the death of Christ is clearly foretold in the Old Testament, yet I do not recollect any passage wherein the time that he should continue in the grave is mentioned. Christ himself, however, frequently declared that he must lie dead three days.

47. And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.

Digitized by Google

The doctrine of the remission of sins upon repentance and reformation, was a doctrine taught by all the prophets, from the time of Noah, who was a preacher of righteousness before the flood, to that of Jesus Christ; and indeed must necessarily be the doctrine of all those who call upon men to forsake their sins: for without hope of pardon there can be no inducement to repent; but new proofs of the mercy of God, new arguments and motives to forsake sin, are offered by the gospel, and a new class of people are to be invited to accept of the divine mercy, even the whole Gentile world. The message of the apostles is therefore very properly described as the preaching of repentance and remission of sins to all nations, in the name, or under the authority, of Christ. For this purpose they were to begin at Jerusalem, as Christ began his ministry in Galilee.

48. And ye are witnesses of these things.

That is, of my death and resurrection; the subjects upon which he had before been speaking.

49. And behold I send the promise of my Father upon you; but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high.

Here he plainly refers to the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit, which are called the promise of the Father, because they had been promised to the Son by him. They are thus described by Jesus in the evangelist John, xv. 26, "But when the Comforter," or *the advocate*, "is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the spirit of truth which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me." In both passages we see how careful Christ was to inform his disciples that the extraordinary powers which he was about to communicate came from God.

Digitized by Google

50. And he led them out as far as Bethany, and he lift up his hands and blessed them, *besought the divine blessing for them.*

51. And it came to pass while he blessed them, he was taken from them, and received up into heaven.

The ascension of Christ seems to be here connected with his appearance to his disciples on the day of his resurrection; whereas this same writer, in another book, (Acts i. 3.) tells us that an interval of forty days passed between one event and the other.

52. And they worshipped him,

They prostrated themselves upon the ground before him, in token of great reverence, as it was usual to do to prophets and other great personages.

And returned to Jerusalem with great joy,

53. And were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God. Amen.

The former sorrow and dejection of the disciples proceeded from the apprehended loss of their master, and their not understanding the designs of Providence; now, when they are explained to them by Jesus himself, they appear to display the greatest wisdom and goodness, and fill their minds with the highest admiration and gratitude; and although Jesus is taken from them, they are assured that he is alive, and that he will continue to live in a state of great honor and reward, till they shall be permitted to join him.

Digitized by Google

REFLECTIONS.

1. We learn, from the preceding history, what little foundation there is for the insinuation which has been thrown out by unbelievers, against the story of the resurrection of Christ, and revived by a late popular writer, that it was founded upon one of those delusions which have often prevailed respecting good men unjustly put to death, that their spirits or ghosts had been seen by their friends after their death: for we find that the apostles themselves suspected that the appearance of their master was nothing more than a shade, or a ghost, but were convinced, from the most satisfactory evidence, from seeing, handling and conversing with him, and from his eating in their presence, that their apprehensions were wholly without foundation. Besides, although this appearance of Jesus to his disciples was in the night-time, all the rest, and they are six or seven in number, were in the day-time, when such phantoms are not supposed to make their appearance, and when men may easily satisfy themselves respecting the truth or falsehood of what attracts the notice of their senses: and whether Christ appeared to his disciples by night or by day, he spent sufficient time in their company to enable them to recover from the effects of surprise or terror, and to remove any doubts which might arise with respect to the reality of his appearance. Those who can suppose that eleven men, who believed that they saw, felt and handled a man, only saw, felt and handled a ghost, must distrust the evidence of sense, and are not to be satisfied with any proofs that God or man can produce.

2. After the example of the apostles, let us be continually praising and blessing God for the gospel of Christ. From it we derive the best views of the divine nature and government; a clear knowledge of our

Digitized by Google

duty in the present world, and, what renders its value inconceivably great, the hope of a happy immortality. The apostles saw reason to praise God incessantly for such a blessing, when it was first revealed to them, and the happy effects of it had not yet been seen. But we have lived to see the scheme completely unfolded, and to observe its beneficial consequences in reforming and comforting mankind; we have, therefore, additional reason for gratitude and praise, and shall be wholly inexcusable if we neglect so obvious and necessary a duty.

I have now gone, in the way of exposition, through the two gospels of Matthew and Luke; selecting, however, from the latter only such passages as differ or vary from the former; and I have the same observation to make at the close of Luke's gospel which I took occasion to offer at the end of Matthew, that this evangelist uniformly represents Jesus as a man, inspired by God, and acting by a commission from him, and that in neither of these books does there appear the smallest intimation of the deity of Christ, or of his being a great pre-existent spirit, inhabiting a human body. Yet it must be remembered that each of these gospels was supposed, both by the person who wrote it, and by those by whom it was received, to contain every thing of much importance relating to the Messiah. The gospel of Mark may likewise be included in this observation: for it bears so strong a resemblance to the other two, that some have supposed that Mark was an abridgment of Matthew, and others that it was an abridgment of Matthew and Luke together. There are, however, in him variations from both, which lead me to think that he wrote his gospel from independent evidence: but with respect to the person of Christ he entirely agrees with them. It becomes those, therefore, who maintain the doctrines to which I have referred, to consider what the importance of

Digitized by Google

such truths can be, which three out of four, at least, of the evangelists must be acknowledged to have passed over in silence; and if not important, what a strong presumption there will be that they are no part of christianity; for if *a man* could answer every purpose of a divine messenger, as these three evangelists appear plainly to have thought, by always representing Christ as such, it appears highly improbable that God should work so stupendous a miracle as appearing in the world in a human form, or sending a superangelic being into a human body. I am induced to make these observations, more particularly at this time, because we are about to enter upon an evangelist who is supposed to contain a clear account of these doctrines, which the other three had omitted, and to conceive such an idea of their importance as to begin his gospel with a declaration of one or the other of them. If we recollect the silence of the others, we shall see reason to suspect that the language of the fourth has been mistaken, or at least shall be led to examine it with caution.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

AN

EXPOSITION,

&c. &c.

JOHN, the writer of this gospel, was one of the twelve persons whom Christ chose to be his constant attendants, during his public ministry, in order that after his death they might give a true and faithful report of what they heard and saw. As he was also one of the three whom Jesus selected from the rest, to accompany him upon particular occasions, we learn hence what opinion our Lord entertained of his fidelity, and how well qualified he must have been for becoming the historian of his life. In the fourth chapter of the Acts, the thirteenth verse, we find John and Peter noticed by the Council, or Sanhedrim, as unlearned and ignorant men, or, more properly, illiterate and private persons: for such is the meaning of the term which we render ignorant in this place. This account corresponds very well with what we learn of John from other sources: for he, with his brother James, was a fisherman, and the stile in which he writes, when he uses his own language, is remarkable for plainness and simplicity, and he is only figurative and hard to be understood when recording that of Christ. But this account very ill accords with the opinion of those who suppose that he begins his gospel with an allusion to the language of heathen philosophers, whose writings he had probably never read. His primary object in writing his gospel, he himself declares, when he says, xx. 31, "These are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the son of God; and that, believing, ye might have life through

Digitized by Google

his name;" but this object was common to him with the other evangelists, Matthew, Mark and Luke, who all wrote their respective histories to prove that Jesus was the Messiah. He, therefore, must have some secondary design in view, more especially as ecclesiastical writers of the best credit inform us that John had seen the histories of the other three evangelists, before he wrote his own, and the same thing is pretty evident from the gospel itself; for we find comparatively few things in John the same as in the other writers, although these coincidences are very common in Matthew, Mark and Luke. As what they have written was sufficient to prove Jesus to be the Messiah, he would probably have rested satisfied with what they had done, unless he had some other object in view, which has with much probability been supposed to be to show the guilt of the Jews in rejecting Christ, and to justify the conduct of Providence in the sufferings now inflicting, or about to be inflicted, upon them on that account. For, according to Dr. Lardner, John published his gospel not later than the year sixty-eight of the Christian æra, or about thirty-eight years after the ascension of Christ; and a year or two after the other evangelists wrote; and the Jewish war began in the year sixty-six of that period, and terminated in the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in the year seventy. This time, therefore, when the prophecies of Christ began to be fulfilled, was a very proper season for writing a history with the design before mentioned. The particular passages upon which the preceding supposition is founded, are too numerous to be here repeated; but they may be seen by consulting the writer to whom I have just referred. If we keep this idea in our minds, it will show us the reason why many things omitted by the other evangelists are introduced into his history by John, and particularly why he begins his gospel with the introduction which follows.

Digitized by Google

John i. 1—14.

Two different interpretations of this passage have at different times been given by those who believe Christ to be a man. I shall lay them both before the reader, and leave him to determine which appears more agreeable to truth. I begin with that which has been suggested last, and which has of late been more generally embraced. The advocates for this interpretation maintain that John, intending to point out the guilt of the Jews in rejecting Christ, begins his gospel with declaring that the wisdom of God, which belonged to him from everlasting, and which they had been used to revere as the cause of all things in the external world, dwelt in the man Christ Jesus, working the miracles which he performed and suggesting the doctrines which he delivered. According to them, therefore, the words of the apostle are to be thus translated and explained:

1. In the beginning was wisdom, and wisdom was with God, and wisdom was God.

In favour of this translation, they observe that the term Logos, which we have in the original, had been used in Greek to signify sometimes *reason*, and sometimes *a word*; but that they who first translated the gospel into Latin, translated it *word*, and all the European languages followed the Latin, as being the oldest translation, and among the rest the English, rendering the passage, *in the beginning was the word*; but that Tertullian and some few of those who understood Greek as well as Latin, have thought that *the reason of God*, or *the wisdom of God*, is a fitter translation of the term Logos; in which case wisdom is personified, that is, represented not as a quality of the divine mind, but as a separate being; that this circumstance, however, ought to create no difficulty; since

Digitized by Google

such personifications are very frequent in scripture, and we have, in particular, a similar one of wisdom in the book of Proverbs, viii. 22—31 verses, to which the apostle is here supposed to allude, where wisdom is represented as saying, "The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old. I was set up from everlasting, or ever the earth was, &c." Lest, however, it should be imagined that John intended to speak of a distinct intelligent being, by personifying wisdom, he takes care to tell us that he meant nothing more than God himself: for after saying that "in the beginning was wisdom, and that wisdom was with God," he adds, "and wisdom was God." Those then who recollect that it is said God is love, and God is light, will not think it a harsh expression, we are told, to say God is wisdom, or, which is the same thing, wisdom is God.

2. The same, *that is, wisdom*, was in the beginning with God.

That is, God was complete in wisdom and all perfections, before he made any manifestation of himself to his creatures.

3. All things were made by it, and without it was not any thing made that was made.

All things were made according to the most perfect wisdom.

4. In it was life, and the life was the light of men.

Divine wisdom that made all things and gave life to mankind, hath taught them the way, and furnished them with the means, to attain everlasting life.

5. And the light shineth in darkness, and the darkness hath not comprehended it.

Digitized by Google

The way to eternal life has been made known to men, but many, through their blindness and obstinacy, lose the benefit of it. Darkness is here put for men of dark and prejudiced minds; in the same manner as in Ephes. v. 8. "Ye were sometimes darkness, but now are light in the Lord." This remark primarily respected the bulk of the Jewish nation and its rulers, who had rejected Jesus, the light of the world.

6. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.

The first opening of this plan of divine wisdom for the salvation of men, was made by John the Baptist. We see hence, that to be sent from God signifies not coming down from heaven, but receiving an extraordinary commission from God: for no one supposes that John existed in any state prior to the present. In like manner Moses said, Numb. xvi. 28, 29. "Hereby ye shall know that the Lord hath sent me to do all these works: for I have not done them of my own mind." When, therefore, Christ appeals, near thirty times, to his being sent by the father, he must be understood to mean thereby his receiving a commission from him.

7. The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the light, that all men through him might believe.

8. He was not that light, but was sent to bear witness of that light.

John the Baptist, although an extraordinary person and eminent prophet, was not that great prophet and divine teacher, as some supposed; but was commissioned to point him out, and lead men to him.

9. That was the true light, which lighteth every one that cometh into the world.

Digitized by Google

That is, it was designed to be an universal blessing, and has done all that was fit to be done, to enlighten all men, Gentiles as well as Jews, with the knowledge of God and of true religion. There was a propriety in describing Christ as the light of the world, not only because Jesus speaks of himself under that character, but likewise because the old prophets had used the same imagery in speaking of him. Thus Isaiah says, in the name of God, "I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the ends of the earth." xlix. 6. At this ninth verse the apostle is supposed to drop the personification of the divine wisdom, with which he set out, and to speak of God in person directly.

10. He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not.

From the beginning of the world, by his ordinary providence and by many extraordinary interpositions, God was constantly present among men, who are the especial creatures of his love, and it was their fault that they knew him not.

11. He came to his own, and his own received him not.

God came in the person of Jesus to his own people the Jews, but they received him not.

12. But as many as received him to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.

All have not rejected this last revelation of divine wisdom, and those who have embraced it, of whatever nation they be, are taken into the number of the children of God, and are heirs of eternal life, equally with Jews.

13. Which were born not of blood,

Digitized by Google

nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

To which heavenly inheritance they are entitled not by their birth, as Jews, or by becoming such by marriage or proselyteship; but by the good pleasure of God and a holy obedience to his will.

14. And wisdom was made flesh,

That is, the divine wisdom was in the fullest manner communicated to the man Christ Jesus. It is observed that flesh is frequently put for man: thus, Psalm lxv. 2. "O thou that hearest prayer, unto thee shall all flesh," *all men*, "come." But it frequently and peculiarly stands for man as mortal, subject to infirmities and sufferings, and as such is particularly appropriated to Christ here and in other places.

And dwelt among us, full of grace and truth.

The wisdom of God resided in the man Christ Jesus, displaying by him its favours and communications to us, far beyond what were enjoyed under Moses' dispensation. This sense of this latter clause is confirmed by the observation made below, verse 17, "for the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." In the phrase, *wisdom dwelt among us*, there is supposed to be a manifest allusion, which is said to be implied in the Greek word εσκηνωσεν, *tabernacled*, to what the Jewish doctors call the Shechinah, that is, the presence, the dwelling, the habitation of God among his people in the tabernacle and in the temple. Thus Moses tells us, Exod. xxix. 45, that God said, "and I will dwell among the children of Israel;" and Solomon, at the dedication of the temple, says, 2 Chron. vi. 2. 18, "I have built an house of habitation for thee, and a place for thy dwelling for ever. But will God in very deed dwell with man upon earth?" If, therefore, God was spoken of as dwelling amongst the children of Israel, and dwelling with men in the tabernacle and temple at Jerusalem,

Digitized by Google

on account of the miraculous tokens of his presence and his extraordinary providence vouchsafed to them thence, on particular occasions; with equal propriety, and in a much nobler way, may God be said to have dwelt among men in the person of Jesus, who was the true oracle of God, replenished by him with wisdom and power, for the instruction, guidance and support of his church and people.

In the middle of the fourteenth verse is a clause, which, for the sake of distinctness, is considered separately, and is thus translated and paraphrased by those who adopt the preceding explanation.

And we beheld his glory from the Father, the glory as of the only begotten Son, full of grace and truth.

We beheld in Jesus such marks of divine wisdom and power, that we could not doubt of his being the Messiah. The beholding his glory from the Father, was beholding the tokens of his divine authority in the miracles that accompanied him. Thus Peter, speaking of Jesus, second epistle, i. 17. says, "He received honor and glory from God the Father."

The only-begotten signifies no more than beloved son, and is as much as to say, the Messiah, the Christ; son of God, in the language of the Jews at this time, being one of the phrases to denote the Messiah; and the apostle adds the term, *only-begotten*, to express his ideas of the affection with which he was regarded: for an only child is an object of peculiar affection.

I have now set before you one method in which these words have been explained, and it is one adopted by men of great eminence for talents and knowledge of the scriptures; *that which supposes what is called by the apostle* THE WORD, *to be the wisdom of God, and his meaning to be, that this wisdom afterwards resided in the man Christ Jesus; producing all the miraculous effects afterwards attributed to him.* I shall now proceed to mention the second method of explain-

Digitized by Google

ing this language, having first made one or two observations on that which I have already laid before you.

It must be admitted that the interpretation now given of this controverted passage is at least very plausible, and that it removes several difficulties with which the prevailing interpretations are encumbered; particularly that which arises from supposing that the evangelist, in the very beginning of his gospel, intended to represent Jesus Christ as the eternal God or some great pre-existent spirit, by whom all things in the whole visible creation, or at least in heaven and earth, were made; which is directly contrary to the clear and constant tenor of the sacred writings, which uniformly ascribe the creation of the world and of all things besides to God. Nor is it less difficult to allow that the evangelist should begin his history with announcing the existence of this great spirit, a subject upon which the other evangelists are entirely silent, without telling us whence he had this knowledge, concealed, so far as appears, from the apostles and every other Christian. It is also no less extraordinary that having announced this great Being as that who inhabited the person of Jesus Christ, and given him a particular name, he should never call him by the same name, or speak of him again throughout his history or the rest of his writings. These difficulties afford a strong presumption that the interpretation which they accompany cannot be true. But although that which I have now read to you may not be encumbered with the same, yet candour and justice oblige us to confess that it appears to be accompanied with others of no little weight.

For it is natural to expect that the apostle, in writing the history of his master for the information of his countrymen and others, would employ expressions which were either well known or might be easily understood by the persons for whose use it was written. Yet, although the term translated *wisdom*, does undoubtedly signify reason and intelligence, and is so used by heathen writers, I do not recollect any instance in the Greek translation of the Old Testament,

Digitized by Google

whence the apostle would be most likely to take its meaning, where it is applied to express the wisdom or reason of God. The term used in the book of Proverbs, where the wisdom of God is personified in the passage referred to, is not LOGOS, but another Greek term, SOPHIA.

Again, according to this interpretation, we are told in the fourteenth verse, that the wisdom of God became flesh, that is, dwelt in man, as it has been interpreted; as if it was from that time, and not before, manifested to the world. Yet in the preceding verses we find that this same wisdom is described as having life in it, and this life as being the light of men, as shining in darkness; as lighting every man that cometh into the world; all which things imply that it had been already manifested to the world. But such a construction of the apostle's language represents him as writing in a desultory and incoherent manner, and cannot therefore be true.

Besides, it must be acknowledged, that to say "wisdom became a man," is an unusual, if not a harsh, expression. Let us see how far these difficulties, and others which might be suggested, can be removed by the second interpretation, to which I have referred.

This interpretation supposes, that the word spoken of by the apostle in the introduction to his gospel, is not the wisdom of God, but the person who is the subject of the rest of his history, or Jesus Christ. I would remind you, before we enter on this explanation, that it is an established rule, founded upon obvious reasons, that to interpret scripture by itself, (that is, to employ one part of the sacred writings to explain another, and more especially to infer the sense of an obscure passage from another of the same author, which is more plain,) is the safest and fairest mode of interpretation.

1. In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was [a] God.

For an explanation of this verse we are are referred to the first epistle of John, which he begins in this

Digitized by Google

manner: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and our hands have handled, of the word of life——declare we unto you." In this passage it is evident that by the word of life, which John says that he had seen with his eyes, looked upon and handled, he must intend not the doctrine of the gospel, but Jesus Christ himself, who alone could be the object of these senses. The reason of calling him by that name is pretty obvious: it was the leading design of his mission, both by his discourses and resurrection, to establish the doctrine of eternal life. The propriety of the appellation is evident from the office with which he was invested, and it will occasion no surprise to those who recollect that the same personage is called a *door*, a *shepherd*, a *vine*, *bread*, a *stone*, the *light*, the *way*, the *truth*, the *resurrection*, the *life* and our *hope*, either by himself or by his apostles, and that he received these various denominations on account of the different purposes which his mission was calculated to answer.

It being admitted then that the word of life, in the epistle of John, signifies Jesus Christ, we easily see that *the word*, in the beginning of the gospel, is only an abbreviation or shorter term for the *word of life*, which was probably familiar to the apostle, and attended with no obscurity to those for whose immediate use he wrote his gospel. If any one, however, should think that *the word* is put for *the word of God*, and that that appellation is given to Christ by way of eminence, on account of his communicating the word of God in a more excellent manner than any other prophet, there can be no great objection to the alteration.

Having seen what John means by *the word*, we are prepared for understanding what he refers to by *the beginning*, which signifies not the creation of all things, but the beginning of the gospel dispensation; for John, in the passage just referred to in his epistle, says, "That which was from the beginning declare we unto you," which no one understands of any thing else than

Digitized by Google

the beginning of the gospel. The same phrase is used in this sense in another part of this gospel; as when Jesus says, John xv. 27. "And ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with me *from the beginning.*"

And the word was with God*:

To explain what is meant by this language, we are referred to the eighteenth verse of this chapter, where Christ is said to be in the bosom of the Father, and to John vi. 46, where he says that he is the only one who hath seen the Father: for by being in the bosom of the Father, and seeing the Father, no more is meant than being intimately acquainted with the divine counsels and designs; and if these phrases signify no more than this, *to be with God* may, agreeably to this language, be considered as meaning the same thing: so that by saying the word was with God, the apostle may be understood to assert that he fully comprehended his most secret counsels and designs, and was hereby prepared to reveal them to the world; just as a companion and friend is better qualified to give an account of a man's purposes than a stranger.

And the word was [a] God.

That is, on account of the knowledge and power communicated to him by Almighty God, he may have been said to have been a God on earth, just in the same manner as God was pleased to say to Moses, Exodus vii. 1. "I have made thee a God to Pharaoh;" and as magistrates are called Gods, Psalm lxxxii. 1. 6. "God standeth in the congregation of the mighty, he judgeth among the Gods. I have said ye are Gods;" which last verse our Saviour cites, John x. 34. in vindication of himself against the Jews, who stoned him, because, as they said, "Thou, being a man, makest thyself a God." Agreeably to the language here made use of, it is said in another place, that Christ, being in

* If to come forth from God, is to be sent upon his service, to be with God, is to have such previous intercourse, to be so with him, really or metaphorically, as to be instructed or qualified for that service. With God Christ received his errand; in the world he published it.

Digitized by Google

the form of God, or in the form of *a* God, took upon himself the form of a servant. In this manner has the above declaration of the evangelist been explained, by those who maintain that the translation may be altered in the manner in which I have exhibited it. But if it should be insisted that this alteration is not countenanced by the idiom of the original, and the common translation be retained, viz. "*and the word was God*," still this language may be understood to intimate no more than a complete union of counsels and designs between the word of life and God; so that the authority of the one might be considered as the same as that of the other; just in the same sense as Christ says, "I and my Father are one;" and "he that hath seen me hath seen the Father."

2. The same was in the beginning with God.

Here the apostle, in order to impress it more strongly upon the mind, repeats the assertion which he had made in the preceding verse, and which has been already explained.

3. All things were done by him, and without him was not any thing done which was done.

That is, All things relating to the Christian dispensation were done or transacted by Christ. It was he who sent the apostles out to preach, who endowed them with miraculous powers, and commissioned them to teach all nations. It is not the creation of the world, we are told, which is here spoken of: for when that is described, another term is used; but all things which were transacted under the gospel. Many passages might be produced from scripture, in which the phrase, *all things*, must be understood in a limited sense, and confined, as it is supposed to be here, to the particular objects of which the writer is treating. Thus Paul says, 2. Cor. v. 17, "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away, behold all things are become new;" where *all*

Digitized by Google

things does not mean the heavens and the earth, but every thing relating to the temper or manners of an individual.

4. In him was life, and the life was the light of men.

By *life* we are here to understand *eternal life*, the certain knowledge of which was communicated to mankind by Jesus Christ, and which laid the best foundation for comfort and joy, which are often represented in scripture by light. The meaning of the evangelist in this verse is completely illustrated by what he says in his epistle, 1 John v. 11, "And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his son;" as well as by what he says in another part of his gospel, John v. 26, "As the Father hath life in himself, so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself."

5. And the light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not.

In regard to this verse both interpretations coincide. Darkness is here put for men of dark and prejudiced minds, in the same manner as in Ephes. v. 8, "Ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord." The observation of the apostle John, in this verse, primarily respected the bulk of the Jewish nation, who rejected Jesus, the light of the world, because they did not understand the nature of his mission.

6. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.

This verse affords us an example, as was observed before, of what we are to understand by being sent from God—that it signifies not coming down from heaven, but receiving an extraordinary divine commission: for no one supposes that John came down from heaven into the world; and it will help us to explain the same and similar phrases when applied to Christ.

Digitized by Google

7. The same came for a witness, to bear witness of that light, that all men through him might believe.

8. He was not that light, *as many supposed him to be*, but was sent to bear witness of that light.

The three last verses are to be considered as a parenthesis in the apostle's discourse: he now returns to the subject of which he had been before speaking, the word of life whom he had called light in the fifth verse.

9. He, *that is, the word of life*, was the true light, which, coming into the world enlighteneth every man.

Here that is said to be done, which was only intended to be done: for we have already learnt that the darkness, that is, men of dark and prejudiced minds, did not comprehend the light; but it was designed by Providence for the benefit of all, Gentiles as well as Jews.

10. He was in the world, and the world by him was, and, "*yet*," the world knew him not *.

* Though the greatest part of his life was spent with God, that is, in privacy, and he is now with the Father, no longer personally resident among us, yet he came forth into the world, and was for some time freely and publicly conversant among his countrymen, preaching the word of God, with every evidence of divine authority attending him: yet, though the Jewish dispensation was calculated to excite the expectation of him at this time, to reveal him, and to lead him to their notice and their reverence; though the law and the prophets spake of him; though the world had been further prepared for his appearing by the ministry of his expected harbinger; that world, the subjects of the Jewish dispensation, to whom such advantages in this respect had been vouchsafed, knew him not. According to this explanation, which is that of the late Mr. Cappe, the world is not the globe on which we live, or the general body of mankind, but the Jewish world or people.

Cappe's Critical Dissertations, vol. 1. p. 10.

Digitized by Google

In order to understand the evangelist in this verse, it is necessary to observe that that new and more advantageous state of being into which the children of Israel were brought by the Mosaic dispensation, is spoken of in the Old Testament as *a creation*. "Thus saith the Lord, that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel." Isaiah xliii. 1. When a better state of things was afterwards introduced by the gospel, of which Gentiles as well as Jews were permitted to be partakers, this was called the *new creation*, and the individuals who enjoyed the benefit of it, *new creatures*; they are also said to be quickened and made alive, and *to be*, while others, who are out of this state, are said to *be dead*, and *not to be*. The instrument of this new creation is Jesus Christ. Hence God is said, by the apostle Paul, to have created all things by Jesus Christ; that is, to have brought all men, Jews as well as Gentiles, into this new and more advantageous state of being. It is also to be observed, that to be *created of God by Christ Jesus*, and *to be of God by him*, are phrases of the same import, one being the natural consequence of the other: for by whom we are created, by him also we are*. Hence it is that the same writers who teach that all things are created by Christ Jesus, likewise teach that all things are by him. "To us," says the apostle, "there is but one God, even the Father, of whom all things are; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom all things are, and we by him." That this language does not relate to our original production, but to a moral renovation, is evident from what Paul says in another place, 1 Cor. i. 30, "Ye Gentiles," says he, "are of God by Jesus Christ, who of him is made unto us sanctification and redemption;" so that it appears that this new existence or creation, is produced by sanctification and redemption. Having, from these examples, seen what the language of the Old Testament is, we are prepared for understanding what the apostle intends in this verse, and for perceiving that however new the translation which has been given of it may sound, it accords very well with the language of the other sacred writers.

* Commentaries and Essays, vol. ii. p. 13.

Digitized by Google

"He", or the word of life, "was in the world;" that is, in the world of mankind, among whom he was sent for the most benevolent purposes, and through him the world was; that is, through him mankind had their new existence or new creation. "And the world knew him not"; by some he was received, and by them the world was put into a state of renovation; but the majority of the people of that age rejected him.

11. He came to his own country, and his own people received him not.

As Christ had been foretold under the character of a prince of the house of Israel, the Jews might, with propriety, be called his people, as those over whom he was one day destined to reign; but a majority of that generation rejected him.

12. But as many as received him, to them gave he a right to be children of God, to them who believe on his name;

The Jews were called the children of God, and that appellation was confined to them before the coming of Christ; but after they had rejected him, the Gentiles were invested with the same privilege, upon professing faith in Christ.

13. Who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

That is, as this verse was interpreted before, who obtain this privilege of being the children of God, not by birth as Jews, or by becoming such by marriage or proselyteship, but by the good pleasure of God, in consequence of a holy obedience to his will.

14. And the word was flesh, and dwelled among us, being full of grace and truth.

Digitized by Google

That is, Jesus Christ was a man, with all the infirmities and weaknesses of human nature, and lived not in a splendid manner, but with his apostles and disciples in the humblest circumstances: yet, in this mean and afflicted state, they perceived evident marks of his being the beloved son of God, in the extraordinary miracles which were wrought by or for him.

And we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only-begotten from the Father.

I have now set before the reader two interpretations of this much controverted passage. They are both recommended to us by containing in them no new and abstruse doctrine, and nothing which contradicts the express declarations of scripture in other instances, a charge to which the popular explanations are certainly liable. The second interpretation is particularly recommended, by being founded upon the apostle's own words in the beginning of his epistle, and by its uniformity and simplicity. According to this, the sacred historian, in the introduction to his narrative, gives us an abstract or outline of the history which he is about to write, as is usual with other historians in entering upon their work; or just in the same manner as a painter first draws a sketch or outline of the picture which he afterwards fills up. How far it possesses the other characteristics or signs of the truth, I shall leave to the reader's judgment. To that I shall also leave the practical inferences to be derived from it, which must depend upon the sense in which the language is understood.

John i. 15—28.

15. John bare witness of him, and cried, saying, This was he of whom I spake, He that cometh after me is preferred, *or*, "*was preferred*," before me:

Digitized by Google

for he was before me, rather, "*for he was my chief*," *or* "*superior*."

The word here rendered *before*, is translated *chief*, in Matt. xx. 27, "He that will be chief among you, let him be your servant."

The apostle John, having finished his introduction to his gospel, in which he speaks of Jesus under the character of the word, or the word of life, now proceeds, like the other evangelists, to give us the testimony of John respecting him, and, like them, he represents him as acknowledging his superiority to himself. As the appearance of the Baptist preceded that of Christ, some might be inclined to think him the greater prophet; but he tells them, that he who came last in point of time was first in point of rank. The propriety of this explanation seems to be confirmed by what each of the other evangelists has reported of his language, Matt. iii. 11. Mark i. 7. Luke iii. 16. "There cometh one mightier than I;" and by what the Baptist himself says, verse 27, where he declares that he is not worthy to perform for him the meanest office. If we suppose John to refer, in the last clause of the verse, to the prior existence of Christ to his own, there will be no force in his reasoning: for priority of existence could not be deemed a just ground for priority of rank, although superiority of office and character may.

16. And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace, *rather*, "*even grace upon grace*," *that is, one favour after another.*

This verse is to be connected not with that which immediately precedes it, but with the fourteenth, in which the evangelist says of the word of life, or Jesus Christ, that he was full of grace and truth; and he now goes on to say that they had participated of this fulness in an abundant manner. The fifteenth verse, by the error of some transcriber, is put out of its place:

Digitized by Google

for it interrupts the sense where it occurs, and must, if we judge from the connection, have stood between the eighteenth and nineteenth verses, where it naturally connects itself with what follows.

17. For the law was given by, *or*, "*through*" Moses; but grace and truth, *or*, "*true grace*," came by Jesus Christ.

Grace and truth is a Hebrew idiom for true grace, in the same manner as when Christ says himself, that he was the way, the truth, and the life, John xiv. 6, he does not mean so many distinct things, but that he was the true way to eternal life. The gospel of Christ is stiled *true grace*, in opposition to other dispensations of a similar nature, which were certainly valuable favours; but this was favour by way of eminence, so that, in comparison with it, no other deserved the name. The gospel of Christ is called the word of grace more than once in the Acts of the apostles: see xiv. 3, "Which gave testimony unto the word of his grace," speaking of God: xx. 32, "And now, brethren, I commend you to God and the word of his grace, which is able to build you up," &c. But the language of Peter approaches still nearer to that which is used in this passage, and may be considered as fully illustrating its meaning: 1 Pet. v. 12, "Exhorting and testifying that this is the true grace of God, wherein ye stand;" meaning the gospel.

18. No man hath seen God at any time; the only-begotten, *that is, best beloved*, son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.

The apostle John, in the preceding verse, had been comparing together the different communications of God to men, by Moses and Christ; and had given the preference to what came by the latter. He now proceeds to support his declarations by proof; saying that no one, not even Moses or any of the prophets, was fully acquainted with the divine purposes, but that his

Digitized by Google

beloved son, who was admitted to the greatest intimacy with him, knew his most secret designs, and had manifested them to the world.

Seeing God with the bodily organs, is not what is here intended; for that is a favour, so far as it could be bestowed upon men, which has been enjoyed by many. Thus we read, Exod. xxiv. 9, 10, "Then went up Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and they saw the God of Israel;" that is, they saw some external symbol of his presence; the cloud or the light.

Seeing God, therefore, must signify knowing him, being acquainted with his designs. In this sense does this evangelist use the phrase in his third epistle, 11, "He that doeth evil hath not seen God," that is, hath not known him; and he means to assert that Moses had not such familiar intercourse with the Divine Being as to discern his designs; a favour which was however granted to his son Jesus.

To be in the bosom of God, is a figurative expression for being intimately acquainted with his designs, and borrowed from the manner in which the Jews lay or reclined together at feasts and entertainments, where it was usual for a man to lay himself on the same couch with an intimate friend, and before his breast, or bosom. This was the situation of John, the beloved disciple, at the last supper, when he leaned upon the bosom of his master; and in this manner are we to understand what is said of Lazarus being carried into Abraham's bosom; he was laid next to him, upon the same couch.

The term *only-begotten* has been supposed by some to refer to some peculiar mode in which Christ was produced by the Father, but really signifies no more than *beloved*, or, *best beloved*, as is evident from its being used on all occasions by John, where the other evangelists use beloved. In this verse there is no reference to any existence of Christ before he appeared in the world, but only to the knowledge which he had of God, from the familiar intercourse which he enjoyed with him after he came into it.

Digitized by Google

19. And this is the record, "*the testimony*," of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem, to ask him, Who art thou?

20. And he confessed, and denied not, but confessed, I am not the Christ.

At this time there was a general expectation among the Jews that the Messiah's kingdom was approaching, and that he would be preceded by one or more prophets. When John, therefore, made his appearance, the Sanhedrim sent some learned members of their body, to inquire of him, who he was, in regard to his public character; expecting to find that he was either the Messiah or his forerunner, Elias. John readily satisfies their inquiries in regard to his not being the Messiah.

21. And they asked him, What then, Art thou Elias? And he saith, I am not. Art thou that prophet? And he answered, No.

A considerable difficulty has been supposed to arise from this verse. John, the forerunner of Christ, appears to be ignorant of his proper character: for when asked, Art thou Elias, he replied, No. Yet Matthew tells us, xvii. 12, 13, that our Saviour declared to his disciples, when they said, "How then say the Scribes that Elias must first come? I say unto you that Elias is come already, but they have done unto him whatever they listed; likewise shall also the son of man suffer of them. Then the disciples understood that he spake unto them of John the Baptist." To remove this difficulty, some have supposed that when the priests and Levites asked him, Art thou Elias? they meant to ask art thou Elias, or Elijah the Tishbite in person, and that John might with propriety answer that he was not.

Digitized by Google

To others such an answer, if he was really conscious that he was the Elias of Malachi, although not Elijah in person, seems to approach too near to a prevarication to be attributed to so excellent a person as John the Baptist; especially as he was not only asked whether he were Elias, but also whether he were that prophet, (that is, the prophet intended by the Elias of Malachi) and answered, No.

They have therefore supposed that the Baptist did not know that he was Elias, as Christ declared him to be, and that he was really ignorant of his being the forerunner of Christ: he knew, indeed, that he was to precede some great prophet, who was to work miracles, and be far superior to himself; but then he was not certainly informed whether he were the Messiah, or some other prophet that was to precede the Messiah. This supposition they consider necessary, in order to account for the answer which he here gives to the priests and Levites, and likewise for the message which he sent to Christ while in prison, saying, Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another? For if John had been sure that he was the Elias, and the forerunner of the Messiah, he could entertain no doubt whether Jesus were the Christ; but if he were uncertain about his own precise character, he must be uncertain, as the history shows him to be, about the precise character of Christ.

In confirmation of this supposition, they observe that John was a prophet of very limited powers, working no miracles, as most of his predecessors had done, and deriving his title to be more than an ordinary prophet, from the circumstance of his preceding the Messiah.

22. Then said they unto him, Who art thou? that we may give an answer to them that sent us? What sayest thou of thyself?

23. And he said, I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make

Digitized by Google

straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias.

John was so far acquainted with his own character, as to know that he was sent to prepare the people for some great event, and was the person intended by Isaiah in the passage to which he refers; but whether that event was to be the appearance of the Messiah, or of some prophet that was to precede him, he seems not to have been informed.

24. And they which were sent were of the Pharisees;

25. And they asked him, and said unto him, Why baptizest thou then, if thou be not that Christ, nor Elias, neither that prophet?

This language expresses the indignation of these Pharisees at John, for drawing such crowds after him, by having recourse to so unusual a method as baptizing; a method to which no one in their apprehension ought to have recourse, who was not a very eminent person, either the Messiah, Elias, or the prophet intended by Elias. There seems to be nothing in the Old Testament prophecies to justify an expectation that when the Messiah, or Elias, should appear, baptism would be used.

26. John answered them, saying, I baptize with water, but there standeth one among you, *or*, "*there is one among you*," whom ye know not.

He intimates that his baptizing with water was not an unmeaning form, but intended to prepare the Jews for the reception of a great personage, who was soon to make his appearance among them.

27. He it is, who, coming after me, is preferred before me; whose shoes'

Digitized by Google

latchet I am not worthy to unloose, "*whose shoe-string I am not worthy to untie.*"

In the parallel passage in Matt. ii. 11, the phrase is, "whose shoes I am not worthy to bear," that is, to carry away. To untie the shoes, or sandals, and carry them away, was the business of servants. By this language, therefore, John intimates that he was so far inferior to the great personage which they had among them, and who was soon to appear, that he was not worthy to be his servant.

28. These things were done in Bethabara, beyond Jordan, where John was baptizing.

REFLECTIONS.

1. In this portion of scripture we behold a striking example of the integrity and humility of the forerunner of Christ; of his integrity, in frankly acknowledging that he was not the Messiah, nor Elias, when he apprehended he had no just claim to either of these characters, although he knew that the consequence of this acknowledgment would be that he must greatly sink in the estimation of the Jews; of his humility, in speaking in such lofty terms of his successor, and in such degrading language of himself. Had the Baptist possessed the disposition and character of an impostor, we should have found him acting in a very different manner; assuming that character which was likely to do him most honour, and which his countrymen were most inclined to acknowledge, whether he were entitled to it or not. We should have found him jealous of the reputation of a rival, and doing every thing in his power to depress him and aggrandize himself. From his pursuing a conduct which is the reverse of all

Digitized by Google

this, we learn to place greater confidence in those pretensions which he really made; and the propriety of speaking the truth freely, after his example, however injurious to our interests or reputation. We learn too the propriety of the injunction given by another divine messenger, who tells us in honour to prefer one another. Happy would it have been for the world, as well as for the Christian cause, if succeeding teachers of religion had copied more exactly this example. We should not then have heard of that pride and arrogance, of those envyings and underminings, of those contentions and quarrels which have so often disgraced their characters and disturbed the peace of society. In regard to knowledge, the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than John, as Christ says; but in point of moral excellence, the most enlightened have shown themselves far his inferiors.

2. Let us be thankful to God for the true grace, the invaluable favour, of the gospel. If we compare it with the light of nature, or with former dispensations of religion to mankind, it exceeds them as much in worth as the substance is better than the shadow, or as the light of day is better than the darkness of the night. If we compare this gift with the common blessings of life, it will be found to surpass them as much in value as an eternal existence, for which it prepares us, and to the hope of which it raises us, surpasses a temporary one of a few years. Let us not reject this best gift of heaven, and, by regarding it as the offspring of fraud or enthusiasm, expose ourselves to greater injury from the fear of imposture than the greatest imposture could occasion. Above all, let us remember that it is the most important of those talents which God has committed to our trust, and for our improvement of which we shall be called to a strict account.

Digitized by Google

John i. 29—42.

29. The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.

The day after the priests and Levites had been with John, to ask him who he was, and he had answered them that he was not the Messiah, Jesus came to John, to show his belief in his divine mission by attending his preaching, and perhaps to hear what he had further to say concerning him; for he had already pointed out Jesus to the people at his baptism.

By calling Jesus the lamb of God, he probably referred principally to the innocence of his character, in which he resembled a lamb. By this quality, and his preaching and miracles, he foretels that Jesus would accomplish, what he found himself unable to do, the reformation of the world. It has been supposed that there is here an allusion to the death of Christ, and that John meant to intimate, that as the sacrifice of a lamb was, under the law of Moses, effectual for removing the ceremonial uncleanness of the offerer, so the death of Christ would be efficacious for removing the moral guilt of sinners throughout the world; but it does not appear that John certainly knew Jesus to be the Messiah, or, if he was assured of this, that he had any knowledge of his death: for it is probable that John, as well as the apostles and other Jews, expected a temporal and triumphant Messiah.

30. This is he of whom I said, After me cometh a man which was preferred before me: for he was my chief, *or*, "*principal.*"

Digitized by Google

That is, after me cometh a prophet who is behind me in point of time, but before me in point of rank: for he is greater than I. Some* chuse to translate the middle clause of the verse, not *which was preferred before me*, but *which hath been before me;* supposing that the Baptist meant to intimate that his successor was present to his mind, as the object of continual expectation and reverence. This will accord very well with the latter part of the verse, "for he was my superior, or chief;" for that contains the reason of placing him in his view.

The circumstance to which the Baptist alludes in this case seems to be this, that to a man who is walking, the persons and things *before* him are the natural and usual objects of attention, not those *behind* him. Whereas, on the contrary, says John, He that cometh after me hath been, in this respect, before me; as he hath been the object of my attention, for whom I have been continually looking, according to the prophecies and the particular instruction to myself.

31. And I knew him not: but that he should be, rather, "*that he might be*," made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come, baptizing with water.

John here declares that he was sent to baptize with water, in order to direct the attention of the Jews to his successor; but that he did not know who that successor was to be, until he was pointed out to him in a miraculous manner at his baptism. We are told, however, Matt. iii. 14, that when Jesus came to John to be baptized, John forbad him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee and comest thou to me? which expressions seem to imply that John knew Jesus to be a great prophet and his successor, before he was baptized, contrary to what he has here declared. But the passages may be reconciled by supposing John to refer, in what he is represented as saying in Matthew, to private conversation, which the history does not re-

* Theological Repository, Vol. i. pp. 54, 295, 297.

Digitized by Google

cord, which passed between himself and Jesus, and which discovered so much knowledge and piety on the part of Jesus as to fill him with admiration, and to induce him to make the inference ascribed to him, that he was fitter for performing the ordinance of baptism to another than for submitting to it himself. Such a knowledge of Jesus as this, it would be easy for him to obtain by a few questions, very naturally proposed to him before baptism, and yet to have been in total ignorance of his character and person before that event. It was wisely ordered by Providence, that John should not be acquainted with Jesus before the descent of the Spirit upon him at his baptism, to prevent a suspicion that there had been any collusion between them, and that John had been induced, by the partiality of friendship, to announce Jesus as his successor.

32. And John bare record, "*bare testimony*," saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven, like a dove, and it abode upon him.

That is, not in the form of a dove, but with the gradual and gentle motion with which a dove alights upon the ground. The appearance was probably that of a bright light or flame, such as the Schechinah is represented to be: for the other evangelists say that the heavens were opened upon the occasion; an appearance which light would naturally produce. This flame stood suspended over him for some time, and was intended to intimate that the spirit or power of God was descending or coming upon him, in the same manner as the cloven tongues of fire were intended to point out miraculous powers bestowed upon his apostles.

33. And I knew him not; but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost.

Digitized by Google

Baptizing with the Holy Ghost here promised, is supposed to refer to the communication of miraculous powers, and particularly on the day of Pentecost; and there can be no doubt that that event is to be included; but it may be doubted whether it is to be confined to it, and does not refer to miracles in general: for no where, if not here, does John refer to that long series of miracles wrought by our Lord before his crucifixion, and yet he is understood to have predicted them. for it is said, John x. 41, "John, indeed, did no miracle, but all things that John spake of this man were true;" that is, he performs miracles, as John foretold.

The word *baptize*, is used with great latitude in the New Testament, and is more than once employed to express visiting with calamity; as when our Lord says, "I have a baptism to be baptized with;" and tells the sons of Zebedee that they should be baptized with his baptism, meaning thereby, that they should be visited with great calamities. To baptize with the Holy Spirit may, therefore, mean, to demonstrate his divine authority by the clearest and most numerous proofs, by performing extraordinary miracles himself, as well as by communicating miraculous powers to others.

34. And I saw and bare record, that this is the son of God, *that he is a highly favoured prophet.*

This he inferred, not only from the descent of the symbol of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus, but likewise from the voice uttered at his baptism, which declared, "This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased." That, by the son of God, John did not understand the Messiah, is pretty plain from his entertaining doubts upon that subject afterwards, which could never have been the case, had he been informed by a voice from heaven that Jesus was he. That "son of God" was sometimes understood to signify no more than a favorite prophet, seems evident from what our Saviour said when accused by the Jews; "Say ye of him whom the Father hath sanctified and sent into the

Digitized by Google

world, Thou blasphemest, because I said, I am the son of God?"

35. Again, the next day after, John stood, and two of his disciples;

36. And looking upon Jesus as he walked, he saith, Behold the lamb of God.

37. And the two disciples heard him speak; and they followed Jesus.

38. Then Jesus turned, and saw them following, and saith unto them, What seek ye? They said unto him, Rabbi, (which is, being interpreted, Master) where dwellest thou?

This question they asked with a view to show how ready they were to become his disciples, and to live with him, at least for the present.

39. He saith unto them, Come and see. They came and saw where he dwelt, and also abode with him that day: for it was about the tenth hour; *four o'clock in the afternoon: so that the day was far spent.*

40. One of the two which heard John speak, and followed him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother.

The other disciple is supposed to be John the evangelist, the writer of this history, who, with that modesty which is characteristic of him, conceals his own name.

41. He first findeth his own brother

Digitized by Google

Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the Messiah (which is, being interpreted, the Christ.)

This conclusion he had hastily drawn from what John had said to him, and from discoursing with Christ, before he saw his miracles; but he happened to be right in making the conclusion, although it was formed upon insufficient ground. *Messiah* signifies, in the Hebrew language, what *Christ* does in the Greek, The Anointed One.

42. And he brought him to Jesus, and when Jesus beheld him he said, Thou art Simon, the son of Jona; thou shalt be called Cephas (which is by interpretation a stone.)

The original name of Peter was Simon; but Jesus denominated him Cephas, or a stone, because he regarded him as the stone or rock upon which his church was to be built. Peter is the Greek term for a stone, and therefore appears to be nothing more than the Syriac word Cephas, translated into that language. Matthew represents Jesus as giving Peter this name upon a different occasion, just after he had declared him to be the Messiah: Matt. xvi. 18, "I say unto thee, thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church." But Christ might repeat at that time the language with which he had addressed him on his first coming to him.

REFLECTIONS.

1. In entering upon this new history of Christ, we may observe with pleasure the evidence which it contains of being authentic. It is attributed to John, the

Digitized by Google

companion of Christ, and one of the apostles; and we see, already, traces of its proceeding from his hand, or, at least, from that of a person who was the witness of the facts which he relates: for we find him noting the day on which particular events took place, and even the particular hour of the day: this method of writing would be natural to one who wrote in the circumstances of John, but is not the conduct of a man who writes a fiction. It is his interest to speak of events in general terms, and to avoid the detail of particular circumstances: for the more minutely he enters into them, the more likely he is to afford evidence of the falsehood of what he writes. But the apostle, writing from memory, states the order and time in which things occur, as is usual with eye-witnesses. In such a writer we want nothing but fidelity in relating what he heard and saw: for, in that case, what he delivers must be true.

2. We have reason to rejoice in the account here given of the excellence of Christ's character, when he is repeatedly spoken of by his predecessor as the lamb of God. It is the testimony which John bears to the character of Jesus before he entered upon his public ministry; it is what is proved by every thing related of him, during his appearance in the world, as a prophet, and is ascertained beyond all doubt by the circumstances of his death: it is what is obvious and indisputable to his friends, and what is not denied by his enemies. Well did a person of such eminent virtue deserve to be the messenger of the divine will to mankind; well does he deserve to be trusted by them, for the truth of what he says, when he declares that he is sent of God. To be eminently good, and, at the same time, the inventor of falsehood, are two things absolutely irreconcileable, and which never did exist together.

3. In addition to the testimony of John to the excellence of Christ's private character, and to the certainty of his divine mission, we have that of God himself, manifesting his regard for him, and the import-

Digitized by Google

ance of his office, by a striking miracle at his baptism. If, therefore, we believe not John, or believe not Jesus, yet let us not refuse the testimony of God.

Lastly, with these methods of announcing Jesus to the world, the testimony of a prophet, and the visible glory which shone round him when baptized, let us rest satisfied, without having recourse to others, which, to say the least of them, are of doubtful origin.

John i. 43. to the end. ii. 1—11.

43. The day following Jesus would go forth, *or*, "*wished to go forth*," into Galilee, *intending there to begin his ministry*, and findeth Philip, and saith unto him, Follow me.

Before this invitation was given to Philip, it is probable that some other conversation passed between them, although not here related.

44. Now Philip was of Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter.

This circumstance is mentioned, to explain the reason why Philip becomes inclined to follow Jesus; he had been informed of his character by Andrew and Peter, his townsmen, who were before acquainted with him.

These things may appear to some not worthy to be recorded: yet they are of consequence, considered as a proof that the narrative of the evangelist is a true history, which, it has been observed, always abounds with particulars of persons and places.

45. Philip findeth Nathaniel, and saith unto him, We have found him of

Digitized by Google

whom Moses, in the law, and the prophets did write: Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.

The passage in the books of Moses to which Philip is supposed to refer, is Deut. xviii. 18, in which God says, "I will raise them up a prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak unto them all that I command him." Some have, however, supposed that the reference is to the prophecy of Jacob, which is also contained in one of the books of Moses, in which the Patriarch declares, that ".the sceptre shall not depart from Judah until Shiloh come." The Messiah is often foretold in the prophets, but principally in Malachi, Daniel and Isaiah. It is observable that the evangelist repeats the words of Philip, respecting Jesus being the son of Joseph, without taking any notice of his mistake; whence some have thought it probable that he entertained the same opinion.

46. And Nathanael said unto him, Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?

As Nazareth was a mean place, and the inhabitants a brutish, uncivilized people, Nathanael can not think that any thing excellent, much less so distinguished a personage as the Messiah, can come thence.

Philip saith unto him, Come and see.

Come to him, and judge for yourself; and you will then be quickly convinced of the truth of what I say.

47. Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, and saith of him, Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile, *rather*, "*in whom is no fault**."

* See Pearce's Commentary, Note.

Digitized by Google

Behold one who is a descendent of Abraham, not only by pedigree, but by excellence of character: for, as Paul says, Rom. ix. 6, "they are not all Israel who are of Israel." Jesus knew the character of Nathanael not from any personal acquaintance with him, but from that miraculous knowledge of men which he possessed, in common with other prophets. This knowledge was so common, that the Jews regarded it as a test, whereby to judge of a person's having a divine mission: for when a woman of indifferent character came to Jesus, they said, Had this man been a prophet, he would have known that this woman was a sinner.

48. Nathanael saith unto him, Whence knowest thou me?

As Jesus had never seen him before, he expresses his surprise at his being acquainted with his character.

Jesus answered, and said unto him, Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig-tree, I saw thee.

How Nathanael was employed under the fig-tree we are not told: but he was probably engaged in some act of devotion, which he was conscious must be concealed from every human mind, except aided by divine power. This discovery induced him to make the acknowledgment in the next verse.

49. Nathanael answered, and saith unto him, Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the king of Israel.

We see here, that *son of God*, and *king of Israel*, are synonymous terms, and that they both signify the Messiah. The origin of these appellations will be found 2 Samuel, vii. 14, where God, after promising to David that one of his children should succeed him, says, "I will be his father, and he shall be my son." The same language again occurs, Ps. ii. 7, "The Lord hath said unto me, Thou art my son; this day

Digitized by Google

have I begotten thee." The Jews, believing that the Messiah was to be a descendent of David, very naturally apply to him the appellation of Son of God, which the Divine Being himself had given to one of his posterity: so that Messiah, and Son of God, came to signify the same thing. Many examples of this are to be found in the gospel history.

50. Jesus answered and said unto him, Because I said unto thee, I saw thee under the fig-tree, believest thou? Thou shalt see greater things than these.

51. And he saith unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto you, hereafter, *rather*, "*from this time*," ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the son of man.

These last words cannot be understood literally: for no examples can be produced from the gospels, of angels usually ascending and descending over Jesus; but the language is highly figurative, and means no more than that there would be an evident communication between heaven and himself; as much so, as if angels had been seen ascending and descending; referring to his miraculous powers, which he derived from heaven, and was able to exercise upon all occasions. When a revelation was about to be made to Jacob in a dream, it was preceded by the appearance of angels ascending and descending, to intimate to him, that a communication was then opened between heaven and earth.

It is generally supposed, that from this time Nathanael became a disciple and apostle of Christ: for it is not likely that Jesus would neglect to invite one, to whom he had given so high a character, to be one of his followers; or that Nathanael would refuse to

Digitized by Google

comply with it: besides this, we find him mentioned, John xx. 1, 2, with the apostles, to whom our Lord appeared at the sea of Tiberias. "And there were together, Simon Peter and Thomas, called Didymus, and Nathanael, of Cana, in Galilee." The reason why this name does not appear in the catalogue of the twelve apostles, as given us by the other evangelists, is, that he is there called Bartholomew, having, as was very common among the Jews, two names.

John ii. 1—11.

1. And the third day there was a marriage, *rather*, "*a marriage feast*," in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there.

The third day is computed from the time at which Peter came to him.

2. And both Jesus was called, "*invited*," and his disciples to the feast.

It was probably celebrated on the occasion of the marriage of some relation of Jesus, which was the reason of his being invited.

3. And when they wanted wine, the mother of Jesus saith unto him, They have no wine.

The company which attended was, probably, larger than was expected, and therefore the provision for the feast failed. This increase of company, might be occasioned by the expectation that Jesus would be there, who was already announced by John the Baptist as a great prophet. Mary, his mother, having learnt that his ministry was soon to begin, either from what John had said, or from some private intimations of his own, hints to him that this was a proper opportunity for exercising his miraculous powers, by supplying the defici-

Digitized by Google

ency of wine. She might, probably, be induced to think of such a miracle, from the example of Elisha, who, in a time of dearth, multiplied a few loaves so much as to make them sufficient for a hundred men. 2 Kings, iv. 42.

4. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, what have I to do with thee? *or*, "*what hast thou to do with me?*" Mine hour is not yet come.

This was intended as a gentle rebuke to Mary, for presuming to direct him in the exercise of his ministry, and to show her the reason why he was not forward to work a miracle upon the present occasion; inasmuch as the time for that purpose was not fully arrived. It would hence appear, as if Jesus had been induced to perform a miracle, to satisfy the expectation of his mother, somewhat sooner than he intended. That the term *woman*, with which he addresses her, contained nothing in it disrespectful at that time, is evident, from his employing it in speaking to her from the cross, when he committed her to the care of John for support, John xix. 26. "Woman, behold thy son."

5. His mother saith unto the servants, Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it.

This shows that she did not regard his answer as an absolute refusal, and that she still entertained hope that he would fulfil her wishes.

6. And there were set there, six water-pots of stone, after the manner of purifying of the Jews, containing two or three firkins a-piece.

These water pots were set here, that the Jews might wash themselves, according to the traditions of the elders, before they sat down to meat. It is calculated,

Digitized by Google

that altogether they contained about fourteen gallons of water; such a quantity of wine could not have been suddenly produced by any artifice: but if it had been less, there might have been some ground to suspect a fraud.

7. Jesus saith unto them, Fill the water-pots with water; and they filled them up to the brim.

8. And he saith unto them, Draw out now, and bear unto the governor of the feast; and they bare it.

The circumstance of a governor of the feast being appointed, shows that the company expected was large, and that the quantity produced might not be a disproportionate supply.

9. When the ruler of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and knew not whence it was (but the servants which drew the water knew) the governor of the feast called the bridegroom,

10. And saith unto him, Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine, and when men have well drunk, *or*, "*drunk a good deal*," then that which is worse; but thou hast kept the good wine until now.

The governor here speaks of the common practice; but no inference can be drawn hence, respecting the sobriety or intemperance of the present entertainment.

11. This beginning of miracles did Jesus, in Cana of Galilee, and manifested

Digitized by Google

forth his glory; and his disciples believed on him.

REFLECTIONS.

1. We see here the commendable zeal of those who were acquainted with Christ, in communicating the knowledge of him to others. Andrew and Peter tell Philip, that they had seen the Messiah, and Philip tells Nathanael. In the same manner, whatever knowledge in religion we possess, of which others are destitute, let us be ready to impart: if they are ignorant of Christ, let us labour to make them well acquainted with him; if, knowing something of him, they reject his authority, or have misconceived the nature of his person or purposes of his mission, let us endeavour to convince them of their error, and to give them better information. To confine to ourselves what we have learnt; to say, let others take the same trouble to examine and enquire which we have taken; let them submit to the same chances of meeting with the truth, or of falling into error, is inconsistent with the principles of common good nature, to say nothing of Christian benevolence: for error is the cause of evil, and religious error more than any other. To behold the mistakes of mankind, therefore, upon this subject, with indifference, while we believe them to be attended with such consequences, is to be destitute of humanity. Remember, the injunction of Christ to his disciples is, "What I tell you in darkness, that speak ye in light, and what ye hear in the ear, that preach ye upon the house-tops."

2. In the conduct of Nathanael, in coming to Jesus, we see a commendable openness to conviction, which was happily satisfied. He was prejudiced against Christ, because he came from Nazareth, and he could not easily admit that so great a personage could proceed from so mean a place; yet he does not refuse to listen

Digitized by Google

to the attempts which are made to change his opinion; but when invited to examine the character and pretensions of Christ himself, readily complies with the invitation, and comes to Jesus for that purpose. Had he done otherwise, he would not have deserved that high character here given of him by Christ, as an Israelite indeed, in whom there was no fault. Let us endeavour to follow so excellent an example, if we hope to have any claim to the same character. However improbable opinions may be, or from whatever quarter they may proceed, let us at least give them a candid hearing; this is no more than is due to a consciousness of our own fallibility, and to the experience of mankind, who have often discovered truth where they least expected to find it. To be entirely free from error, is a degree of perfection which human creatures cannot expect, and which perhaps belongs only to God. But if we act in the manner just recommended, our mistakes will be much fewer than at present; and what remain, although they cannot fail to be pernicious, will, however, cease to be criminal.

3. In regard to the miracle of converting water into wine, I shall quote the words of Dr. Doddridge. "It was performed," says he, "to grace a nuptial solemnity; and who does not see that it was, in effect, a testimony borne to the honour and purity of that happy state, on which so much of the comfort of the present generation, and the existence of the future, regularly depends? How easily could he who thus turned water into wine, have transformed every entertainment of a common table into the greatest delicacies, and have regaled himself daily with royal dainties! But, far superior to such animal gratifications, he chose the severities of a much plainer life. Blessed Jesus! Who can say whether thou art greater in what thou didst, or in what thou didst not do! May none of us, thy followers, be too intent on indulging our taste, or any of our other senses, but, pursuing those intellectual and devotional pleasures which were thy meat and thy drink on earth, may we wait for that good wine which thou reservest for thy people to the last, and

Digitized by Google

for those richer dainties with which thou wilt feast those who shall drink it with thee in thy Father's kingdom!"

John ii. 12—25.

12. After this, he went down to Capernaum, he and his mother and his brethren and his disciples.

The reason of his mother and brethren following him to Capernaum, was probably to take their leave of him now, when he was about to commence his great undertaking; for their residence was at Nazareth.

And they continued there not many days.

13. And, *or*, "*for*," **the Jews' passover was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem,**

14. And found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, "*pigeons*," and the changers of money sitting.

As the Jews who resided in foreign countries attended the feast of the passover, and brought with them the coins of their respective countries, it was necessary to convert them into the current coin of Judæa, before they could make use of them. This service the money-changers in the temple performed for them. The oxen, the sheep and the pigeons were provided for those who had occasion to make offerings of these creatures, and were sold to them. Doves or pigeons were allowed, by the Levitical ritual, to those who could not afford more expensive sacrifices; but to ap-

Digitized by Google

ply any part of the temple to this traffic, and more especially to bring these animals into it, was so contrary to every idea of sacredness, justly attributed by religious Jews to that building, as very properly to excite the indignation of Jesus, and to induce him to have recourse to the extraordinary methods of rectifying this sacrilege, mentioned in the next verse.

15. And when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep and the oxen; and poured out the changers' money, and overthrew the tables;

16. And said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence: make not my Father's house a house of merchandise.

As Christ was the son of God, in consequence of being the son or descendent of David, and the true Messiah, God was in a peculiar sense his father; and therefore the temple, which was the chosen residence of God, and appropriated to his service, was *his Father's house*. In the other evangelists, the language of Jesus upon this occasion is related somewhat differently; "It is written, my house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves."

17 And his disciples remembered that it was written, The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up.

That is, when they saw the strong indignation which Christ manifested towards these people, who had polluted the temple, they recollected the language of David, when speaking of himself, and applied it to Christ. As David's zeal glowed like a flame of fire in his breast, ready to consume him, when he saw God dishonoured, so did that of Christ.

Digitized by Google

18. Then answered the Jews, and said unto him, *rather*, "*hereupon the Jews said unto him*," What sign showest thou unto us, seeing that thou doest these things?

That is, what proof dost thou give of the authority which thou has assumed upon the present occasion, in turning men with thine own hand out of the temple, where the priests alone preside, and in calling that building thy Father's house?

19. Jesus answered, and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.

Although these words bear the form of a command, yet they were not intended to convey any, but only to show what the effect would be, if a command were given for this purpose. In the last clause of the verse Christ seems to speak of the rebuilding of the temple, or the restoration of life, as his own act: I will raise it up: and hence some have inferred, that Christ actually raised himself from the dead; and because the resurrection of Jesus, in other parts of the New Testament, is attributed to God, they have also inferred that he must be the eternal God. But we shall find Jesus using similar language, where no one can attribute to his words the meaning given to them here. Thus he says, Matt. x. 39, "He that loseth his life for my sake shall find it." Mark viii. 35, "Whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it." Luke xvii. 33, "Whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it." In the last passage the word translated *shall preserve*, signifies, shall produce a living creature. Now, as, in these instances, the man who gives up life is said to find it again, and to produce a living being, although a dead body be capable of no such acts, but they are performed for him by God; so Christ may say, that when the temple is destroyed he will raise it again, when he only means that it will be

Digitized by Google

raised for him again by God. The reason of adopting this language is the same in both cases; a desire of preserving a striking contrast, or opposition in the words; the same act which destroys life, restores it. In order to produce this effect, some degree of impropriety of expression is admitted. It should be remembered also, that as Christ was delivering a prediction, he designedly expressed himself with obscurity, lest it might be said that the prophecy accomplished itself.

20. Then said the Jews, Forty and six years was this temple in building, *rather*, "*hath it been in building:*" *for it was not then finished*, and wilt thou rear it up, "*raise it up*," in three days?

Herod, we are told, began to build this temple in the eighteenth year of his reign, and finished the body of the building in nine years and a half; but additional buildings and ornaments continued to be made during eighty years from the foundation, so that it was completed only a short time before its' destruction by the Romans. Of the destruction and rebuilding of this temple the Jews understood Jesus to speak.

21. But he spake of the temple of his body.

As the divine power and wisdom were manifested in a miraculous manner in the temple, so they were also in Christ; and therefore he might speak of himself, in a figurative sense, as the temple of God. In the same manner Paul says of the Corinthians, that they were the temple of the Holy Ghost, because they were furnished with miraculous powers. At the time Jesus pronounced the words, Destroy this temple, he might, perhaps, point to himself; yet, although the Jews understood not his meaning at this time, it is plain that, either from this or some other declaration, they considered him as having predicted his resurrection: for, in consequence of it, they applied to Pilate for a guard of soldiers over his tomb.

Digitized by Google

22. When, therefore, he was risen from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this unto them, and they believed the scripture, and the word which Jesus had said.

At the time when Jesus delivered these words, they were not understood by the disciples, any more than by the Jews; but after his resurrection they recollected them, and then believed that they were a prediction of that event, as they did also in respect to several passages of scripture.

The fact here related respecting the purification of the temple is most probably the same as we have recorded in the other evangelists, but put out of its proper place, not by any mistake of John, but by the error of some transcriber. For the three other evangelists represent the purifying of the temple as having taken place when Christ ascended to Jerusalem to celebrate the last passover before his crucifixion; and it is not likely that they should all be mistaken, or that two events of exactly the same kind took place at different times; for had that been the case, they would both have been noticed by the evangelists.

The nature of the action also by no means accords with the conduct of Jesus, in other instances, at this early period of his ministry: for he is represented as declaring himself to be the Messiah, as soon as he had entered upon the office of an inspired teacher; whereas the other evangelists exhibit him as cautiously avoiding every declaration of this kind, in the beginning of his ministry, and leaving people to judge of his character, not by what he said of himself, but by his miracles. Nor is it easy to explain, if this history holds its proper situation, how the people in the temple came so readily to submit to Christ, when unattended with a crowd, and before he had acquired fame and authority by his miracles. It is also observed, that if the story be removed, the narrative will not appear to be interrupted; the twenty-third verse corresponding very

Digitized by Google

well with the thirteenth. Such transpositions frequently occur in ancient writings, without at all impairing their credit, and more than one such may be pointed out in the Bible.

23. Now when he was in Jerusalem, at the passover, in the feast day, "*at the feast*," many believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did, *or*, "*was doing*."

It is the opinion of Bishop Pearce that this verse should have immediately followed the thirteenth, and that the words, *at the passover*, in this verse, have been added; because they are superfluous; it being sufficiently evident, from the above mentioned verse, what feast was meant by the writer. In the eleventh verse we are told that his disciples believed in him, when they had seen one miracle performed by him; here we learn that others believed, when they saw him perform many.

24. But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men;

25. And needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man.

Christ did not trust himself in the hands of these new believers, but went out to the mount of Olives, or some neighbouring village, to sleep, as he did at his last passover: for he knew the nature of their faith, either that it was so weak as not to resist a powerful temptation to deliver him up to his enemies, or that it led them to regard him as a temporal prince, and would involve him in difficulties with the government, as when they afterwards came to take him by force, and make him a king. When the evangelist speaks of the knowledge which Jesus had of what was in man, he

Digitized by Google

probably refers to supernatural knowledge of what passed in the thoughts of men, of which we have many examples in the history.

REFLECTIONS.

1. We see that a virtuous indignation at gross violations of divine institutions belongs to the most perfect characters. The pious mind of Jesus is deeply offended at beholding the house of God converted into a market place, and he proceeds to manifest his displeasure by warm remonstrances and significant actions, to which a consciousness of guilt induced these traffickers quietly to submit: but he does no injury to the persons of the offenders, although several of their ancestors had been punished with inveterate diseases, or with death, for the like transgressions. If we have imbibed the same spirit which animated our master, we shall feel a like glow of indignation when we behold the honour due to God alone given to another, and the essential attributes of his nature obscured and debased by gross misrepresentations. But while we indulge such feelings, and rejoice in them, as proofs of our zeal for God, let us take care that we suffer not this to overstep the bounds of charity, and to transport us into violences totally opposite to the meek spirit of our master. Let us also remember, that the peculiar character of Jesus, as a divine prophet and teacher, might authorize him to do what would not be justifiable in persons of a private station.

2. There is too much reason to apprehend that the crime of turning the house of God into a place of merchandise was not peculiar to these Jews. It is committed also by Christians, when they come to the public worship of God with minds wholly occupied with the concerns of trade and commerce, and other matters belonging to this world. While such persons appear thoughtful, serious and devout; while they pro-

Digitized by Google

fess to worship and love the great Author of nature and source of all good, their hearts are paying secret homage to Mammon, by being wholly employed in considering how they may increase in riches. Such conduct is as offensive to God, and as justly reprehensible, as that of these profaners of the temple. While, therefore, we condemn the crimes of others, let us be careful that we be not guilty of the same ourselves.

3. We may observe how rationally those Jews acted, who believed in Jesus when they saw his miracles: being works above the ability of man to perform, they were clear proofs of divine agency; and accompanying a person who assumed the character of a divine messenger, they were the most satisfactory evidences of the truth of his pretensions; the evidences likewise upon which the claims of the greatest of their prophets were founded. They were the sign and symbol, or the hand writing, of God, assenting to and approving what this professed messenger said of himself: not to have yielded to such evidence, would have discovered a mind insensible to the most rational motives of belief, and wholly blinded by prejudice. Upon the same ground of miraculous interpositions, Christ claims our belief in his divine mission, at the present day, and those who do not believe in him upon this ground have no good foundation for their faith. Excellent morality may be the fruit of human ingenuity; pretensions to inspiration, the offspring of a distempered and enthusiastic mind; but miracles are the works of God alone, and where they appear with a professed messenger of heaven, although but in one instance, they are undeniable proofs of the justice of his claims.

4. While we acknowledge this respect due to the miracles of Christ in general, let us remember that it belongs, in a peculiar degree, to the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. It is what he himself has repeatedly appealed to, as the best and most unexceptionable evidence of his prophetic character; and if we examine it, we shall find it deserving of all the stress which has been laid upon it. For if God performed so

Digitized by Google

extraordinary a miracle, and conferred so great a favour, upon one who professed to be his messenger; it is a decisive proof that he approved of his claims, and that he wished them to have the sanction of his authority. But to do the same things for an impostor, for one who said he was sent by him to instruct mankind, but who had, in reality, no such commission, would be to give his sanction to fraud; and to secure it a certain reception among the best and most virtuous of mankind. If this be impossible, as every believer in God must say it is, it is equally impossible that Jesus should not be a divine messenger.

John iii. 1—13.

1. There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews; *a member of the Sanhedrim.*

2. The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, "*Teacher*," we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.

That is, we are sure thou art a prophet or divinely authorized teacher, because the miracles which thou performest surpass human power, and can only be the work of God. We see, from this language, what we are to understand by the phrase, coming from God, which occurs so frequently in the gospels; that it signifies no more than having a commission from God: for Nicodemus intends no more than this by it, when applied to Christ, and not coming down from God in heaven. He thought, probably, that this acknowledgment would be sufficient to procure for him the charac-

Digitized by Google

ter of being one of Christ's disciples, and visits our Lord by night for this purpose, through fear of giving offence to his colleagues in the Sanhedrim, or to avoid the shame of holding intercourse with so obnoxious a person. But Jesus informs him that something further was necessary, to become his disciple, than such an acknowledgment. The language of Christ upon this occasion is highly metaphorical, and addressed to the secret thoughts of Nicodemus, rather than to any thing which appears upon the face of his inquiries, and is, therefore, attended with a considerable degree of obscurity.

3. Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

Except a man part with his errors and his prejudices, particularly that error which leads so many of the Jews to suppose that the kingdom of God is to be of a temporal nature, he is not qualified to become my disciple. To see the kingdom of God, is the same thing as being admitted into it; just in the same manner as seeing death is put for dying, Luke ii. 26. What Christ says upon this occasion may be illustrated by what he says to the Pharisees upon another, Luke xvii. 20, 21, "The kingdom of God cometh not with observation," or external show, "the kingdom of God is within you;" that is, it consists in right dispositions of mind. It is also said of John, that he preached the baptism of repentance, which implied a change of mind.

4. Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?

What Christ had spoken of a spiritual, Nicodemus understands of a natural birth, and is therefore perplexed with the difficulty which he here states.

Digitized by Google

5. Jesus answered, Verily, verily I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the spirit, *rather*, " *and of spirit*," he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

These words are an answer to the question of Nicodemus, respecting the necessity of being born again, in which Christ shows that the birth of which he was speaking was of a spiritual nature, a change of principles. This spiritual birth, of which baptism with water was but the symbol, he again solemnly asserts to be necessary, to fit a man for being a proper member of his kingdom in this world. There seems, also, in these words, a reference to the manner in which this member of the Sanhedrim had come to him, which was by night. In opposition to this conduct, which discovered much timidity, Christ tells him, that it was necessary to make a public profession of his religion by baptism. Of this ceremony, as applied to proselytes from heathenism, the Jews were accustomed to speak as a new birth, and to represent the subjects of it as acquiring hereby new relations, and losing those which they had in their unconverted state. Hence it was that Jesus also speaks of the baptism which his religion required, under the phrase, being born of water. To be born of the spirit, or of spirit, is to be spiritually born, in opposition to a natural birth.

6. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the spirit is spirit.

The natural life is different from the spiritual, nor do the privileges of the one belong to the other. These words contain the reason of bestowing the blessings of the kingdom of Christ upon those who are spiritually born, and of withholding them from those who have no other claim than what arises from natural birth, as was the case with the Jews, who were the natural descendents of Abraham.

Digitized by Google

7. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.

8. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the spirit.

There is here a comparison made between the wind and that renovation of principles of which Jesus had been speaking; for as the wind is invisible, but known to exist by its sound and other effects; so this renovation of principles, although invisible, produces great and important effects, and qualifies men for enjoying the privileges before mentioned, as conferred upon it. This comparison is instituted, in order to show the value of this new life; and the ground of that extraordinary distinction which is given to it.

9. Nicodemus answered and said unto him, How can these things be?

10. Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?

Art thou acquainted with the Jewish religion, and dost thou not know what is meant by a spiritual birth? Jesus might well express his surprise at the ignorance of Nicodemus on this subject, since similar language, as we have before observed, was used by his countrymen, who said of proselytes, admitted into the Jewish church by baptism among other rites, that they were born again, and received a new soul; that they were as infants just born. A man accustomed to such language, ought to have found no difficulty in understanding that of Christ.

11. Verily, verily I say uuto thee, We speak that we do know, and tes-

Digitized by Google

tify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness.

You may depend upon what I now assert, as what I have received in commission from God, although the Jews in general do not receive my doctrine as coming from God.

12. If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe if I tell you of heavenly things?

If, when I employ the phrases yourselves use concerning your own rites and customs, ye understand and believe me not; how will ye understand and believe when I declare those truths which I am sent of God to reveal, in language adapted thereto? Some of these truths he obscurely hints at in the succeeding verses.

By earthly things, however, some understand the things in which John the Baptist instructed the Jews; and by heavenly things, those which were peculiar to the mission of Christ; and, in confirmation of this interpretation, they observe that John himself, verse the thirty-first, uses the same language in this sense. "He that comes from above is above all: he that is of the earth is earthly, and speaks of the earth; he that cometh from heaven is above all."

13. And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven; even the son of man, which is in heaven.

That the first clause of this verse, "And no man hath ascended up to heaven," cannot be understood literally, of a local ascent to heaven, is evident from this consideration, that it is not true: for it is generally supposed that Enoch, the seventh from Adam, when he disappeared from the world, was taken up there; and it is certain that Elijah was carried thither in a

Digitized by Google

whirlwind. Neither is it true, as this clause seems to insinuate, in connection with the rest of the verse, that Jesus Christ had ascended to heaven: for we have no account of any such event in the history of his life, except when he took leave of his disciples, after his resurrection. We must have recourse, therefore, to some other method of explaining the words.

Now, according to our way of conceiving of things, a man, in order to become acquainted with the divine counsels, ought to ascend to heaven, and converse with God; hence it is that *to ascend to heaven*, or, *to be in heaven*, comes to signify being admitted to the knowledge of the divine counsels. Thus Moses, when informing the Jews how clearly God had revealed his will to them, Deut. xxx. 12, tells them, "It is not in heaven, that thou shouldest say, who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it unto us that we may hear it and do it?" Now, if ascending up to heaven is not be understood literally of a local ascent, neither is coming down from heaven to be understood of a local descent from heaven, where Christ, or the son of man, had never been. What then is the meaning of coming down from heaven? Nothing more than being of divine origin, or coming from God, in opposition to coming from men. It is in this sense that Christ uses the phrase, when he says to the Jews, Matt. xxi. 25, "The baptism of John, was it from heaven, or of men?" that is, was it instituted by God, or by men? As the baptism of John, then, was from heaven, because of divine appointment, so Christ may be said to come down from heaven, because he had a commission from God to teach. The language which is in this passage applied to a person, is, on other occasions, applied to things, where no one can suppose there is a local descent. Thus the apostle James says, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights." Men are furnished with food and raiment from the earth, on which they live; yet these blessings are here said to come down from God in heaven, because they are his gifts.

We now come to the last clause of the verse, "The son of man, which is in heaven." The son of man

Digitized by Google

could not, at this time, be in heaven: for he was in the world, conversing with Nicodemus: but in a figurative sense he might be said to be in heaven, because he was acquainted with the divine counsels. The evangelist had already used a still stronger expression respecting Christ, John i. 18, where he says, that he was in the bosom of the Father; that is, enjoying a communication of the divine counsels, as freely as a person who sits next to another at table and is said to lie in his bosom.

These words of Christ, then, you see do not relate to any prior existence of his, before his birth in Judæa; but, when divested of their metaphorical dress, signify no more than that he was more fully acquainted with the divine counsels than any other prophet, and authorized to communicate them to the world.

REFLECTIONS.

1. In the conduct of Nicodemus we see the influence of rank and worldly prudence, in perverting men from their duty. He was convinced that Jesus was a prophet, or a divinely authorized teacher; but he was unwilling to acknowledge this openly, by publicly appearing in his company, and therefore came to him by night. Many plausible reasons, no doubt, offered themselves to his mind to justify him in this conduct. Had he unequivocally avowed himself the disciple of Jesus, he must have exposed himself to the displeasure of his brethren in the Sanhedrim, who would have reprimanded him for his misconduct, and perhaps expelled him from their body; or, if suffered to hold his office, he would have been cautiously shunned by his former associates, and his influence been entirely lost. A regard to his own usefulness, therefore, would justify him, he might imagine, in this concealment. But while he calculated the evil which would arise from the open profession of Christianity, he overlooked the much

Digitized by Google

greater good that would have been done to the cause of truth by the patronage of so distinguished a person. While he pleased himself with the idea of acting upon the principles of prudence, he was actuated by a selfish regard to his own convenience, and sacrificed the interests of the public to the apprehended interests of an individual. So do those likewise, who, in the present day, decline the open acknowledgment of important truth, and satisfy themselves with the profession of it in private; the language of prudence is upon their lips, and of a concern to retain the power of doing good, while a selfish concern for themselves is at their hearts. Let us not follow the example of such men, but remember that where error has been publicly supported, it ought to be as publicly renounced; not in one instance only, but on every occasion; not in words only, but by our actions also; for these often speak a more decisive language than any words. In this manner only can we expect to obtain the approbation of a master who knew no disguise himself, and could not countenance it in any of his disciples. When Nathanael came to him in open day, he is welcomed as an Israelite in whom there is no guile; but when Nicodemus comes to him by night, he is received with coldness, and rebuked for his timidity; and every method is taken to discourage a proselyte who appeared to be actuated by worldly prudence.

2. Let us never forget the reality and importance of that new life which Christianity produces, and which consists in the belief of right principles, and in a renovation of character. This is the great design of the gospel of Christ, and without it, a professed faith in its doctrines, and an outward conformity to its institutions, are of no value. It was to begin and complete this spiritual life that Christ appeared in the world; that he wrought so many miracles; and that he suffered and died. Let us judge of our proficiency in Christianity by the growth of this life in our minds; manifesting itself by increasing love and reverence for the Divine Being, and growing diligence in doing good to men.

Digitized by Google

Greatly are they mistaken who infer, from the stress which Christ laid upon baptism for adults, as a public profession of his religion, the necessity of administering this ordinance to infants, in order to their admission into the future and everlasting kingdom of Christ; and who are, for this reason, anxious to have the ceremony performed, when their children are ill, and even dying. Baptism was intended for the benefit of the living, and not of the dead; to engage parents to teach children Christian principles, and to set before them a Christian example, and not to give them a passport to heaven.

3. What Christ says respecting his being in heaven, while on earth, or acquainted with the divine counsels for our salvation, and of his being come down from heaven, or commissioned to reveal them to mankind, may afford us just ground of satisfaction and joy. What we are most concerned to know is not who Christ is in respect to his person; whether a man or an angel; whether a being of our own nature, who existed two thousand years ago in Judæa, or one of a superior order, who existed before the globe of the earth was created; but what message he brings from God to men; what evidence he exhibits of being acquainted with the divine counsels. If we are well assured that he is a divine messenger, and that he hath the most important truths to communicate, it may be a matter worthy of inquiry, but comparatively of little consequence, who the messenger is: when thus recommended he is entitled to our respect and confidence, however frail his nature, however mean his appearance, and although he should be a man like ourselves.

John iii. 14—24.

14. And as Moses lifted up, *or*, "*set on high*," the serpent in the wilderness,

Digitized by Google

even so must the son of man be lifted up; "*set on high.*"

When Jesus found that Nicodemus did not understand what he had said to him, about the necessity of being born again, or of abandoning his Jewish prejudices, before he could be a fit subject of his kingdom; although such kind of language was common among the Jews themselves, when speaking of proselytes to their religion; he said to him, verse twelfth, "If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe if I tell you of heavenly things?" That is, as already explained, if, when I employ phrases which yourselves use, when speaking of your own rites and customs, ye understand and believe me not, how will ye understand and believe if I tell you of those truths which I am sent of God to reveal, in language adapted to them. Some of these heavenly things he proceeds to hint at in the verse which I have read to you, and those which follow, beginning with his crucifixion and death: for it is to this that he evidently refers when he speaks of his being lifted up, or set on high. As if he had said; you expect a triumphant Messiah; but I assure you that I shall be a suffering one, and shall be exposed upon the cross, as Moses exposed the serpent in the wilderness; and for a like salutary purpose. When the children of Israel were bitten with fiery serpents, Moses, at the command of God, made a brazen serpent, and set it upon a pole; and every one that was bitten, who looked at this serpent, was cured*. Such, he insinuates, would be the effect of his death; inasmuch as it would, when connected with his resurrection from the dead, convince men of the certainty of a future life, and hereby both reclaim them from their sins, and give them a title to a future, everlasting existence. Christ makes a like allusion to his death, John xii. 32, "And I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me."

15. That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.

* Numb. xxi. 9.

Digitized by Google

This whole verse Bishop Pearce supposes to be an interpolation, because it interrupts our Lord's argument, and is word for word the same with the last clause of the following verse.

16. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten son, *or*, "*best beloved son*," that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life.

Christ here assigns the reason why his death, or his being set on high on the cross, would produce that universal salvation from death to which he had referred: it proceeded from the benevolence of the Divine Being, who had sent him into the world, to procure, by his death and the consequences of it, eternal life for all mankind, Gentiles as well as Jews. "You expect that the Messiah will come to save the Jews only, and to triumph over and oppress the Gentiles; but I assure you that he is come to save all, of whatever nation they may be, who look up to him upon the cross, or believe in his divine mission and obey his precepts." It is observable that he who in this verse is denominated *the only-begotten son of God*, is, in verse the fourteenth called *the son of man;* which two expressions are easily reconciled, by supposing that he who, in regard to his nature, was an ordinary man, yet, in respect to divine communications, stood single and unequalled; without having recourse to the strange supposition that the human nature and divine were united in the same person.

17. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved.

For God sent not his Son to punish the Gentiles, as you expect, by enabling the Messiah to triumph over them; but to save them. To condemn is here put for

Digitized by Google

to punish: for where men are guilty one is the consequence of the other. We are likewise informed what the phrase, *God gave his Son*, signifies; that it implies no more than sending him, or giving him a divine commission to teach mankind.

18. He that believeth on him is not condemned; but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only-begotten Son of God.

Such are the testimonials to his divine mission, that he who is not convinced by them, and in consequence of this rejects his authority, is worthy of censure and condemnation, and is already censured and condemned in the divine judgment.

19. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.

This is the ground of this condemnation, that he rejects such evidence of a divine mission as none could refuse to admit, but those who are wilfully blind, or under the influence of vicious prejudices. Men who thus reject the gospel, or the evidence with which it is accompanied, from attachment to their vices, are deserving of condemnation.

20. For every one that doth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved, *or*, "*discovered.*"

For we see that men who are conscious of guilt, are unwilling to admit the evidence by which their evil deeds would be discovered and exposed.

21. But he that doth truth cometh

Digitized by Google

to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought, *rather*, "*because they are wrought*," in God.

To do the truth is to act according to divine truth, particularly that of the gospel. In this sense is this phrase used by this evangelist, in his first epistle, i. 6, "If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth," that is, act not agreeably to the truth of the gospel. Of the same kind, also, is the phrase which occurs more than once in the epistles of this apostle, *walking in truth, or the truth.* "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth," that is, walk according to the truth contained in the gospel. To be wrought in God, is to be wrought agreeably to his will. The sense of the passage then is this; He that acteth agreeably to the precepts of the gospel will be ready to embrace it, because it will afford him an opportunity of showing that his actions correspond with the will of God. The figures of light and darkness, which run through these last verses, were probably suggested to Christ by the circumstance of Nicodemus coming to him by night, and might be intended as a reflection upon his conduct in thus seeking concealment.

22. After these things came Jesus, *rather*, "*went Jesus*," and his disciples into the land of Judæa, and there he tarried with them, and baptized.

The conversation between Christ and Nicodemus took place at Jerusalem: thence he went into the country of Judæa, in the midst of which the city stood, for the convenience of obtaining water for baptizing. The same distinction, between Judæa and Jerusalem, is observed in other parts of the New Testament.

23. And John also was baptizing at Ænon, near to Salim, because there was

Digitized by Google

much water there; and they came and were baptized, *that is, men from the neighbouring country.*

24. For John was not yet cast into prison.

This event, however, took place very soon afterwards.

REFLECTIONS.

1. Let us never forget the view here given of the importance of the blessings of the gospel, and of the Being to whom we are indebted for them. They are calculated not only to save us from perishing, but likewise to give eternal life. How great the evil from which we are delivered! How invaluable the benefit bestowed! To God let us ascribe all the praise of this wonderful act of benevolence; it originated in his councils, was contrived by his wisdom, and executed by his hands. Greatly are they mistaken, and very unjust are they to the goodness of the divine nature, who represent the scheme of redemption as originating with Jesus Christ, and as planned and conducted by him, for rescuing human beings from the destruction to which they were doomed by an offended and inexorable Creator. In contradiction to such representations, the scriptures declare not that Christ so loved the world as to give himself for them; but that God so loved the world as to give his Son, to send him into the world, and to abandon him into the hands of wicked men, that whosoever believeth in him, and particularly in his death and resurrection, might not perish but have everlasting life. While, therefore, we are grateful to Christ and his apostles, for the part which they voluntarily bore in executing this great design, let it only be to the subordinate agents and instruments of the Most High;

Digitized by Google

nor let us be so stupid or so unjust, when we receive a favour, as to direct our principal regards to the person who brings it, and to forget or overlook the Being by whom he is sent. This conduct cannot fail to be highly offensive to him, as well as dishonourable to ourselves. Let us follow the example of those who best understood the nature of this dispensation, when speaking of it, and not the fallible authorities of men of modern times, by saying, "Blessed be the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly things, in Christ Jesus."

2. We have the authority of Christ for saying, that the gospel furnishes a test of the characters of men. In a period of time so far removed from the original publication of the gospel, and from those visible proofs of divine interposition, with which it was accompanied, and especially at a time when this institution has been so generally and grossly defaced, as scarcely to retain any lineaments of the divine original, it would be going further than we are warranted to do, to say that all those who reject it must be actuated by vicious prejudices or bad motives. Yet, as the gospel contains the purest system of morals, and, if believed, must lay a great restraint upon the evil passions of mankind, bad men must necessarily wish that it were not true, and be averse from receiving it; while the good will, for the same reason, be the more disposed to embrace a system which only recommends to them what they already approve. To this cause, therefore, we may venture to attribute much of the infidelity which prevails in the world, without incurring the charge of want of candour or of Christian charity.

Let those who feel themselves inclined to give up Christianity, seriously consider with themselves whether their dislike does not proceed from this source, and remember that to whatever indulgence errors, proceeding from the ignorance or weakness of the human understanding, may be entitled, none is due to those which proceed from a corrupt heart, either in the judgment of reason or in the estimation of God.

Digitized by Google

John iii. 25. to the end.

25. Then there arose a question between some of John's disciples and the Jews, *or, according to a better reading, and a Jew*, about purifying.

We left John baptizing at Ænon, near to Salim: at the same time Jesus, or rather his disciples, was baptizing in another place, and were followed by much greater numbers. This gave rise to a dispute between the disciples of John and some one of those who had been baptized by Jesus, which baptism was to be preferred? For the Jews applied the term *purifying*, to washing the hands before meat, and would, therefore, necessarily apply it to so solemn a service as that of baptism; John ii. 6.

26. And they came unto John, and said unto him, Rabbi, *Teacher*, he that was with thee beyond Jordan, *rather*, "*by the side of Jordan*," to whom thou barest witness, behold the same baptizeth, and all men come to him.

They complain that his own baptism was deserted, and that all men flocked to Jesus; hoping that John would condemn this practice, and show that his own baptism was to be preferred. By referring to the circumstance of Jesus having been with him, and baptized by him, they intimate their opinion of his inferiority.

27. John answered and said, A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven; *rather*, "*A man can*

Digitized by Google

receive nothing from heaven, except it be given to him thence."

That is, no man can exercise those miraculous powers which ye see Jesus possess, unless he receive them from God, whose gift alone they are. I therefore acquiesce in the superiority which he assumes over me, because it is evidently given to him by God. The Baptist then appeals to themselves, that he had never pretended to be the Messiah.

28. Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before him, *or*, "*before his face.*"

I precede him, as a herald precedes a prince, to announce his approach, or a servant, his master. If *before* be supposed to refer to priority of time, it must be admitted to be true in respect to John, who began his ministry before Christ; but it is no proof of inferiority, which is what he is attempting to show.

29. He that hath the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly, because of the bridegroom's voice. This my joy therefore is fulfilled.

We have here a comparison, the general design of which is pretty obvious, although the terms of comparison are not formally expressed. "Jesus is like a bridegroom, and I am like a friend of the bridegroom, who rejoices in his happiness: for so it is that I rejoice to hear that he baptizeth, and that all men come unto him."

30. He must increase, but I must decrease, *or*, "*he will increase, but I shall decrease.*"

Digitized by Google

As his character and miracles come to be known, men will entertain a much higher opinion of him than they entertained of me; in consequence of which the number of his disciples will increase, while that of mine diminishes. Here it is that the reply of the Baptist to the question proposed to him ends. The words which follow to the end of the chapter seem to be the language not of John the Baptist, but of John the evangelist.

31. He that cometh from above is above all; he that is of the earth is earthly, and speaketh of the earth; he that cometh from heaven is above all.

It has been already shown, in the explanation which was given of the thirteenth verse of this chapter, that to ascend up into heaven and to be in heaven, signified no more, in the figurative language of Christ, than being intimately acquainted with the divine counsels; and, consequently, to come down from heaven, is to come with a commission to reveal these counsels to the world. When, therefore, the person who delivered the words contained in this verse, whether we suppose him to be the Baptist or the evangelist, says of Jesus, He came from above, and came from heaven, he asserts no more of him than he had already asserted of himself. This is very properly assigned as a reason of his superiority to John, as well as to all the other prophets. So much inferior was John to Christ, in regard to divine knowledge, that the one might be considered as speaking earthly things, the other, heavenly things. There appears to be a considerable resemblance between the language of this verse and that of the eighteenth verse of the first chapter, which, it has been already observed, contains the words of the apostle: "No man hath seen God at any time; the only-begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." In each the superiority of Christ to the prophets that went before him is asserted, and, upon the same grounds—his intimate acquaintance with the divine counsels.

Digitized by Google

32. And what he hath seen and heard that he testifieth.

What men learn from the sense of sight or hearing they know with certainty: when, therefore, it is said here of Christ that he testifieth what he hath seen and heard, we are to understand the apostle as intending to say that he testifies nothing but what he knows to be true. Or the words may be understood literally, and be supposed to refer to the different methods in which Christ was made acquainted with the divine will, which might be visions and audible words. Christ tells the Jews, in more than one place, that he declared to them what he had heard from his father. See John xviii. 26. xv. 15.

And no man receiveth his testimony.

That is, few receive it, in comparison with those who reject it, or with the number that might be expected to receive it. That it was not rejected by all appears from the next verse. That the Baptist should use this language, just after he had heard that all men came to Christ, is not very likely. It is rather the language of the apostle, complaining of the unbelief of the world at the time when he wrote.

33. He that hath received his testimony hath set to his seal, *or*, "*hath set his seal to this*," that God is true.

34. For he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God.

God speaketh so evidently to mankind by Jesus Christ, that to believe in Christ, is to believe God; and he who does this, declares thereby that God is true; in the same manner as a man makes a writing his own by setting his seal to it. The evangelist in his first epistle, v. 10, delivers the same sentiment, in a different form; "He that believeth not God hath made him a lyar, because he believeth not the record that God gave of his son."

Digitized by Google

For God giveth not the spirit by measure unto him.

That is, he gives it plentifully. By Spirit we are here to understand miraculous powers. These were communicated to Christ in a fuller manner than to any other prophet or divine messenger that went before him, or came after him.

35. The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand.

He hath communicated to him all the mysteries relating to the kingdom of God, which had been concealed from former prophets; in which sense the words are parallel to Matt. xi. 27, "All things are delivered to me of my Father;" or they may be thus interpreted; God has so well loved his son, as to give him all power, that is, the power of working miracles now, and of bestowing eternal life hereafter. From the mention of a future life in the next verse, it would seem as if this were one of the things which he had conferred upon him a power of giving.

36. He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life, and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him.

To his son God has given a power of raising from the dead all those that believe in and obey his gospel, and of bestowing upon them eternal life; but those who obstinately reject it, after having the evidence of its divine origin plainly set before them, shall not see this future life, that is, shall not enjoy this happiness, but feel the effects of the divine displeasure. Not to see life, is not to live; just as not seeing death is not to die. These words seem more like the language of the apostle, who had heard Christ repeatedly declare that whosoever believeth in him should have eternal life, than that of the Baptist, who had no opportunity of knowing his doctrine.

Digitized by Google

REFLECTIONS.

1. The conduct of John, in the present instance, affords an excellent example to the preachers of the gospel. They are often inclined to envy and oppose one another, on account of superior talents and popularity; and it happens not unfrequently that false or weak friends, by mischievous insinuations and suggestions, blow the flame of jealousy, already burning with too much ardour. In circumstances so trying to their virtue, let such ministers reflect upon the behaviour of this divine messenger, and truly upright man: when reminded of the growing fame and success of the Messiah, and called upon to oppose him, he frankly acknowledges his inferiority, and declares his persuasion that the fame which had given so much alarm to his friends would still increase, while his own would be obscured by it, and expresses the highest joy in what had already taken place, as well as in the prospect of what would ensue. In this conduct there was much magnanimity of mind and genuine philanthropy, not unworthy of the imitation of those who call themselves the disciples of a better master. The motive by which John reconciles his mind to these events is particularly deserving of notice. No man can receive any thing from heaven except it be given him from thence. If your successors or partners in the work have superior endowments, they were given them by God; why therefore should you be displeased with his will, or vainly maintain a contest which Heaven has already decided? If it be your desire to do good, you will rejoice that others are better qualified for it than yourself, and remove with pleasure into obscurity and retirement, to make way for the display of more useful talents. From a regard to men, therefore, as well as to God, it is your duty to acquiesce.

How much is it to be lamented that, for want of

Digitized by Google

attending to these considerations, the professed friends and advocates of religion have disturbed the world by their contests with each other, and hereby done greater injury to the cause they are endeavouring to support, than it could possibly receive from its greatest adversaries. "For where envying is, there is confusion and every evil work."

2. We are again reminded of the importance of receiving the gospel of Christ, and of the danger of rejecting it. That will be rewarded with an endless existence, of ever growing happiness; this will be punished with the loss of it, and with much misery. If, therefore, you value yourselves for the possession of reason, or regard your own interest, be not careless in examining the credentials of one whose claims, if true, will be followed with such consequences, both to those who receive and to those who reject them. Having admitted the divine origin of this gospel, be not negligent in complying with its conditions. No advantages that you can gain, no pleasures that you can enjoy, will bear any comparison with the advantage and pleasure of a life of eternal happiness; no evil can be compared with the loss of such happiness.

John iv. 1—26.

1. When therefore the Lord knew how the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John,

2. (Though Jesus himself baptized not, but his disciples;)

3. He left Judæa, and departed again into Galilee.

Jesus, knowing that the report which the Pharisees had received respecting his growing popularity would

Digitized by Google

excite their jealousy, and induce them to lay plots for his life, resolves to retire to a remote part of the country, which was under the jurisdiction of Herod, and where the influence of the Pharisees was not so great as in Judæa. The reason of his not baptizing proselytes himself, but leaving that work to the apostles, was probably an apprehension that those who enjoyed that honour would assume to themselves some pre-eminence over the other disciples, and that thus a foundation would be laid for future contentions and animosities.

4. And he must needs go through Samaria.

The road from Jerusalem to Galilee lay through Samaria.

5. Then cometh he to a city of Samaria which is called Sychar, near to the parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph.

This town, now called Sychar, but originally Sichem, or Shechem, was built upon a spot of ground of the same name, purchased by Jacob of the father of Shechem, Gen. xxxiii. 19, and afterwards bequeathed to Joseph, xlviii. 22, "Behold," says Jacob, "I have given thee one portion above thy brethren, which I took out of the hand of the Amorite with my sword and my bow;" the language, as it is supposed, of prophetic foresight, in which he declares what would be done by his descendents, rather than by himself. Accordingly we are informed, Joshua xxiii. 32, that in the general division of the country this parcel of ground became the inheritance of the children of Joseph.

6. Now Jacob's well was there. Jesus, therefore, being wearied with his journey sat thus, *wearied as he was*, upon the well; and it was about the sixth hour; *twelve o'clock.*

Digitized by Google

7. There cometh a woman of Samaria, to draw water. Jesus saith unto her, Give me to drink:

8. For his disciples were gone away unto the city, to buy meat.

Being left alone, he asked for water only for himself; whereas, had they been with him, he might have asked for them also. He had probably set out upon this journey early in the morning; and it being now twelve o'clock, or about the heat of the day, he was so exhausted with fatigue and want of food as to be unable to proceed any further: he therefore sat down, and sent his disciples forward to procure refreshments.

9. Then saith the woman of Samaria unto him, How is it that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, who am a woman of Samaria? For the Jews have no dealings, "*no communications*," with the Samaritans.

That is, they will not eat and drink out of the same vessels, or sit with them at the same table: for that they had some dealings with them appears from the disciples being now gone to one of their cities, to buy food. This is the remark of the evangelist, to explain the reason of the woman's question.

The enmity which subsisted between the Jews and the Samaritans had been of long standing, and had risen to a great height. This people were the descendents of a colony of strangers, settled in Palestine in place of the native Israelites, when carried away into captivity by Shalmanezer, king of Babylon. See 2 Kings xvii. 24, 41. They became obnoxious to the Jews from the beginning, because, although they worshipped the God of Israel, yet they joined with it the worship of their own idols; and still more so after the return from the Babylonish captivity, when they built

Digitized by Google

a temple upon mount Gerizim, in opposition to that at Jerusalem, observing similar rites and festivals, and receiving among them every Jew who was dissatisfied with the religion and government of his country. When the Jews were enduring every extremity, in consequence of refusing to worship idols at the command of Antiochus, the Samaritans basely consented to admit the gods of their conquerors. These circumstances inflamed the animosity subsisting between the two nations to the greatest degree of violence, and produced those marks of aversion and hatred at which this woman hints, and of which we have other examples in the gospel. Some remains of this people continue to dwell in Palestine to the present times, and from them we received, about a century and a half ago*, an invaluable treasure; a copy of the five books of Moses in the Samaritan character, that is, in the character of the original Hebrew.

10. Jesus answered and said unto her, If thou knewest the gift of God, "*the favour of God*," and who it is that saith unto thee, Give me to drink, thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water.

By the favour of God, Christ means the gospel, which he also calls living water, because it conferred eternal life on those by whom it was embraced. This, he intimates, he would have given her, in return for a draught of water, if she had asked him for it. Christ calls the water which he should give, living water, that is, running or spring-water. It is probable, therefore, that the water in this well, for which he asked, was stagnant water; and it has been observed that reservoirs of this kind are very common in eastern countries, and that they are called wells†.

* The Samaritan Pentateuch was first brought to this country by Archbishop Usher, about the year 1630.

† Harmer's Observations, Vol. i. p. 422.

Digitized by Google

11. The woman saith unto him, Sir, thou hast nothing to draw with, *thou hast no bucket*, and the well is deep: from whence then hast thou that living water?

In the east it is usual for travellers to carry a bucket and line with them, in order to draw water, their wells not being furnished with these conveniences*; but seeing that Christ was not thus provided, this woman thought it impossible for him to fulfil his promise.

12. Art thou greater than our father Jacob, which gave us the well, and drank thereof, himself and his children and cattle?

As if she had said, If thou canst procure water without a bucket, or if thou hast discovered a spring of living water, thou possessest more sagacity, or art more fortunate, than our father Jacob.

13. Jesus answered and said unto her, Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again;

14. But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst, but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water, springing up into everlasting life, *rather*, "*for the support of an everlasting life.*"

Whoever embraces my doctrine will find it sufficient for eternal life, and when once possessed of it, will feel the want of no other for that purpose.

15. The woman saith unto him,

* Harmer's Observations, Vol. i. p. 420.

Digitized by Google

Sir, give me this water, that I thirst not, neither come hither to draw.

The woman still understands him to speak of real water.

16. Jesus saith unto her, Go, call thy husband, and come hither.

17. The woman answered and said, I have no husband. Jesus said unto her, Thou hast well said, I have no husband:

18. For thou hast had five husbands, and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband: in that saidst thou truly.

Bishop Pearce thinks that Christ's motive for desiring the woman to call her husband, was only to let her know that he was possessed of supernatural knowledge, and knew that she had had five husbands, who died in succession; and the clause which we translate, "he whom thou now hast is not thy husband," he would render, "Thou hast no husband now," supposing the text to have been altered. Certainly the respect shown to this woman both by Christ and her countrymen, makes it improbable she should be the infamous character generally supposed, living in fornication with a sixth man, after having had five husbands.

19. The woman saith unto him, Sir, I perceive that thou art a prophet.

Divinely authorized teachers among the Jews often possessed a supernatural knowledge of present and past events, as well as of such as were future. This woman, therefore, justly infers our Lord's claim to that character from the knowledge which he discovered in the present instance. Finding that he was a divine teacher, she proposes to him a question which was

Digitized by Google

warmly agitated between her countrymen and the Jews, respecting the proper place of worshipping the Divine Being.

20. Our fathers worshipped in this mountain, and ye say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship.

As the great design of the Jewish dispensation was to preserve the knowledge of one God in the world, while the Gentiles paid divine honours to many, the Jews were allowed to erect altars to him, and to pay him public worship, but in one place, and that place, since the time of Solomon, was the temple at Jerusalem, 1 Kings ix. 3. 2 Chron. vii. 12. The Samaritans admitted the same general maxim, but insisted that this honour belonged to the temple which they had built upon mount Gerizim, and in vindication of their practice pleaded the example of their ancestors, Abraham and Jacob, who each of them built altars to God near to Shechem, which was within the country of Samaria. See Genesis xii. 6, 7. xxxiii. 18, 20.

21. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, believe me, the hour cometh when ye shall, "*when ye will*," neither in this mountain nor yet at Jerusalem worship the Father.

That is, to the exclusion of other places: for under the Christian dispensation, which is about to be established, men will be allowed to worship God in every place.

22. Ye worship ye know not what, *or*, "*what ye do not know*," we worship what we do know:

The Samaritans worshipped the same God as the Jews, but admitting no more of scripture than the five books of Moses, they could not be so well acquainted

Digitized by Google

with his character and designs as the Jews, who received the works of the prophets.

For salvation is of the Jews.

As a proof that the Jews are better acquainted with the Divine Being, they are honoured with the appearance of the Messiah among them, who is to teach men the way of salvation.

23. But the hour cometh and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him.

To worship God in spirit and in truth is to worship him with the true affections of the heart, unmixed with rites, ceremonies and sacrifices, which are only the symbols of worship.

24. God is a spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.

God is an invisible Being, and requires the worship of the mind and affections, which are likewise invisible.

25. The woman saith unto him, I know that Messias cometh; (which is called Christ) when he is come he will teach us all things.

It appears hence that the Samaritans expected the Messiah, and that they entertained juster notions of him than the Jews; for they conceived of him as a teacher only, while the Jews regarded him as a temporal prince. This difference in their opinions is probably to be traced to the different books which they received, as containing a revelation from God. For in the Pentateuch the Messiah is spoken of only as a prophet or teacher, but represented as a king in the

Digitized by Google

latter prophets. This may also account for Christ confessing himself to be the Messiah to the Samaritans, while he carefully concealed it from the Jews. The Samaritans, with such notions of him, were not likely to disturb his ministry.

26. Jesus saith unto her, I that speak unto thee am he.

REFLECTIONS.

This portion of scripture teaches us two very important doctrines, Who is the only object of religious worship, and the most acceptable method of addressing him.

1. The Father, properly denominated so by way of eminence, as the author of being to all mankind, and better entitled to that honourable appellation than any earthly parents, is alone to be addressed by us in prayer. When Christ was desired to teach his disciples to pray, he directs them to address him as their Father in heaven; and when he wished to inform this woman whom men would be encouraged to worship in every place under the Christian dispensation, it is the Father, the same Being who had been worshipped before in the temple, in the tabernacle and by the patriarchs, called Jehovah, God, the Lord, the Almighty, and described as infinite in power and wisdom, universal in his presence, without beginning or end of existence, perfect in goodness, righteousness and moral excellence. This is the only Being whom the old and new covenants represent as strictly and properly intitled to the name of God; the only Being who has a claim to our religious addresses. But Christians, unmindful of the language of both, have coupled with him two other Beings, to whom they have given the name and all the attributes of Deity; one of them, his inspired messenger and serv-

Digitized by Google

ant, but a man like ourselves; the other, no more than an attribute of the divine nature. Thus have they relapsed again into the great error of the heathen world, who worshipped deified men, and deified attributes of the Divine Being, from which it was the great design of the miracles and institutions of the Jewish religion to preserve that people. As you value the honour of the Supreme Being, and would avoid the sin of idolatry, carefully shun this pernicious error; join in no forms of worship in which it is countenanced, nor give them the sanction of your presence. God is jealous of the honours which belong peculiarly to himself, and requires that his servants should be so likewise: between men who have different objects of worship there can and ought to be no fellowship in acts of devotion. Labour to deliver the Christian world from so gross a corruption of true religion, which has been the source and cause of so many other corruptions.

2. Let us remember the only acceptable way in which this Being can be worshipped; that is, by supreme veneration, by unfeigned gratitude, by ardent love, by chearful confidence; in short, by the affections of the mind and not the posture of the body, or any external rites. Let this thought be deeply impressed upon your minds, whenever you approach the Divine Being, in the services of public or private devotion, and point out to you the object for which you ought to labour. Let this observation also furnish you with a rule, whereby to determine the value of such services; judge not of their worth in the sight of God by their number or frequency; by the place in which they are performed, or the pomp with which they are accompanied; but by the spirit of the worshipper.

3. Let us rejoice in the view here given us of the Christian religion. It is a well of water, springing up to everlasting life, supporting not a frail and mortal existence like the present, but one that will last for ever; it lays the foundation of excellencies which will survive the body, and the world which we inhabit, and be as durable as the Divine Being himself. How im-

Digitized by Google

mense the benefit; how valuable the means by which it is conveyed! It is a blessing, too, which is open to all; as accessible as that simple element which is to be found every where. It is not confined to a particular district of the earth, to this or that mountain, but may be had in every place where there is a sun to enlighten the eye, or air to breathe; wherever there are human beings, there are persons who may enjoy this eternal life; wherever men worship the Father in spirit and in truth, there they will serve him acceptably. Let us not despise this blessing because it is common, but rather take occasion thence to admire the unlimited benevolence of the giver.

John iv. 27—42.

27. And upon this came his disciples, and marvelled that he talked with the woman, yet no man said, What seekest thou, or, Why talkest thou with her?

They were desirous to know the reason of this extraordinary appearance of Jesus conversing familiarly with a Samaritan; a thing never practised by Jews; but respect for their master prevented them from attempting to gratify their curiosity by asking him or her any questions.

28. The woman then left her waterpot,

She was so elated with the discovery which she had made, and in so much haste to communicate it to her countrymen, that she forgot the purpose for which she came to the well.

And went her way into the city, *that is*, *Sychar*, and saith to the men,

29. Come, see a man which told

Digitized by Google

me all things that ever I did. Is not this the Christ?

It appeared, from what this woman said in the twenty-fifth verse, that the Samaritans expected the Messiah, as well as the Jews; and, from what she says here, that they supposed he would be possessed of extraordinary miraculous powers.

30. Then they went out of the city, and came unto him.

31. In the mean while his disciples prayed him, "*asked him*," saying, Master, eat.

32. But he said unto them, I have meat to eat that ye know not of.

The disciples, having gone to Sychar to procure food, and having returned, pressed their master to partake of what they had provided, well knowing that he stood in need of refreshment; but the prospect of doing good, which had just opened upon him by his conversation with this woman, so much engaged his attention, that he felt no inclination to eat. In answer, therefore, to the pressing intreaties of his disciples, he says that he had food to eat with which they were not acquainted. This they understood literally of natural food.

33. Therefore said the disciples one to another, Hath any man brought him ought to eat?

34. Jesus saith unto them, My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work.

Christ, having received instructions from God to make men acquainted with the Divine will, particularly in regard to a future life, and to work miracles in

Digitized by Google

proof of his authority, speaks of himself in this and other places as sent by God into the world. As the peculiar residence of God is supposed to be heaven, the same thing is sometimes expressed by coming down from heaven. "I came down from heaven," says Christ, "not to do my own will, but the will of him that sent me." John vi. 38. To accomplish this work, he now declares, would afford him more pleasure than the gratification of his natural appetites in eating and drinking; and he assigns this as the reason of his present indifference to food.

35. Say not ye, There are yet four months to the harvest?

That is, Is it not usual with you to say, when ye sow seed, In four months time there will be harvest? This is the common interval, in that country, between the times of sowing and reaping. Many indeed have supposed that Jesus refers to the distance of harvest at the time when he spake, and that it was then four months off; but as Jesus was now returning to Galilee from Jerusalem, where he had been to observe the passover, which corresponds to our Easter, that is, the latter end of March or the beginning of April, and as the Jewish harvest took place before the end of May*, there could not be four months till harvest. Besides, the fatigue and thirst which Jesus is said to have experienced on this occasion, correspond much better with the warmth of the summer season than with the cold of winter.

Behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields: for they are white already to harvest.

There are four months between the time of sowing and that of harvest; but it is not so in regard to the spiritual harvest of which I am speaking; for no sooner is the seed sown than the harvest appears; as you may satisfy yourselves by looking at the fields, which are

* Harmer, Vol. i. p. 68.

Digitized by Google

already covered with crowds of people coming to me, in consequence of what I said to this woman. Having mentioned harvest, Christ still pursues the simile.

36. And he that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal,

Eternal life, in this passage, belongs equally to the reaper and the fruit; it is the wages of the preacher; it is also the reward of the convert.

That both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together.

By "him that reapeth," the disciples of Jesus are intended, and by "him that soweth," Jesus himself. To encourage them in their labours in preaching the gospel, he assures them that they will be rewarded with eternal life, and that their joy in such a benefit will be increased by sharing it with himself.

37. And herein is that saying true, One soweth and another reapeth.

Your case exemplifies the justice of the proverbial saying, that the sower and the reaper are two different persons, and that what one man bestows labour upon, another reaps the benefit of. In what manner this saying was applicable to them he proceeds to show.

38. I sent you to reap that whereon ye bestowed no labour: other men laboured, and ye are entered into their labours.

That is, In the commission which I have given you to preach the gospel, I have sent you to gather fruits, the seeds of which have been sown by other men, by myself and the prophets who went before me, who, by our instructions, have prepared the world for the reception of the gospel. This consideration may furnish you with encouragement for your work.

Digitized by Google

39. And many of the Samaritans of that city believed on him, for the saying of the woman, which testified, "*who testified*," He told me all that ever I did.

Being a woman of unexceptionable character, they gave her full credit, when she informed them that he discovered an acquaintance with transactions in her life which could be known to a stranger no other way than by divine communication, and hence concluded him to be a prophet. The object of their visit was not merely curiosity, but to request his stay with them, in order to further acquaintance.

40. So when the Samaritans were come unto him, they besought him that he would tarry with them; and he abode there two days.

41. And many more believed, because of his own word, *that is*, "*his doctrine.*"

42. And said unto the woman, Now we believe, not because of thy saying; for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the saviour of the world.

By "the world" these Samaritans probably meant no more than the Jewish world, in which sense the term is sometimes used*: for it is not likely that they had any ideas that the Gentiles were to become partakers of the benefit of Christ's mission, of which the apostles themselves remained ignorant, till it was communicated to them by divine revelation.

* Chap. xii. 19. xviii. 20.

Digitized by Google

REFLECTIONS.

1. The portion of sacred history which we have been reading affords us a striking example of the piety and benevolence of our divine master. We behold him sit down, faint with thirst, fatigue and want of food; but when refreshments are brought to him, he refuses to partake of them, and has no inclination to eat. His concern for the success of his ministry is so strong that it overcomes every other feeling, and makes him insensible to the pain of the most powerful calls of nature, to hunger and thirst. What fervent piety, what tender benevolence must there be in the heart which could be thus affected! How far inferior have the followers of Jesus been in this respect to their master! This single incident which the evangelist has related does more to exalt our ideas of the character of Jesus, than a whole volume of encomiums: for they might only have displayed the eloquence of the writer, without having any foundation in fact. This shows us the genuine temper of the divine messenger, in colours which cannot be mistaken. Let us labour and pray to acquire something of the same disposition.

2. The observation of Christ respecting his disciples is applicable to ourselves: other men have laboured, and we have entered into their labours. Much are we indebted too to the instructions, the labours and sufferings of our forefathers, for that degree of knowledge and religious liberty which we now enjoy: we are reaping the harvest of the seed which they sowed, and sowed in tears. Had it not been for what they have done, we should now be worshipping a piece of bread, with the superstitious members of the church of Rome, or wandering in desert woods, with the savage natives of India or America. Let us bless God, the Father of mercies, who has brought us into life at a period of so much improvement, when the world is so

Digitized by Google

well prepared for our reception by the progress which has been made in the arts of life, especially by the diffusion of religious knowledge. While we unfeignedly rejoice in these blessings, and are thankful to God for the benefits which we derive from the services of past generations, let us also remember that we are called to perform similar services for our successors. It is but little that we are required to do, in proportion to what has been done for us; others have borne the heat and burden of the day, and we are called into the vineyard near the last hour. Let us not decline to pay that small debt of labour and suffering which the master of the vineyard has imposed upon us, in return for the benefit which we have derived from the labours and sufferings of others.

3. The view which is here given us of the employment of the teachers of religion, may furnish them with a high idea of the importance of their office, and with the most powerful encouragements faithfully to discharge its duties. They are gathering fruit unto life eternal; the object of their labours is not to secure the continuance of a temporary existence, like the present, for a few years, but one that will never end; not to others only, but to themselves also: for this is the wages of the labourer, and this the reward of the disciple. With the prospect before them of doing so much good, if they succeed, and so much evil, if the designs of Providence are defeated by their negligence, how anxious should they feel for success; how chearfully and indefatigably should their work be performed! May the importance of that work, the example of their master, and the hope of rejoicing with him in the fruits of their labours, be continually before their eyes, and animate their languid endeavours!

John iv. 43. to the end.

43. Now after two days, *rather*, "*those two days*," *that is, the two days*

Digitized by Google

just mentioned, he departed thence, and went into Galilee.

44. For Jesus himself testified that a prophet hath no honour in his own country:

These words do not seem at all to correspond with the preceding verse: for they contain a reason for not visiting Galilee, rather than for going thither. Some persons have therefore conjectured, with a considerable degree of probability, that some words, either by accident or design, have been omitted in the text, and that after the last words of the preceding verse, as it now stands, "he departed thence and went into Galilee," there was once added, "but not to Nazareth:" for the next verse will come in very naturally: "for Jesus himself testified," or declared, "that a prophet hath no honour in his own country." What seems to confirm this conjecture is that these words, when they occur in the other evangelists, are applied to Nazareth only*, and not to the country of Galilee in general, where Jesus spent the greatest part of his time, had the greatest number of disciples, and where, as it appears from the next verse, he was now well received. That a prophet is without honour in his own country, was probably a proverbial saying among the Jews, founded upon what had frequently been observed to be the temper of men's minds in regard to prophets born and educated among them, which Christ repeats, as verified in respect to himself. The cause of this unwillingness in countrymen and neighbours to admit the pretensions of a prophet, is to be sought for in the spirit of envy, which makes men averse to acknowledge as their superiors, those whom they have been used to consider as their equals or inferiors.

45. Then when he was come into Galilee the Galileans received him, hav-

* Matt. xiii. 57. Mark vi. 4. Luke iv. 24.

Digitized by Google

ing seen all the things that he did at Jerusalem at the feast: for they also went unto the feast.

46. So Jesus came again into Cana of Galilee, where he made the water wine.

He hoped that the miracle which he had performed there had excited attention to his doctrine, and prepared the inhabitants for his reception.

And there was a certain nobleman, whose son was sick at Capernaum.

The person here called a nobleman was not what we usually mean by that appellation; for the Jews had no hereditary nobles; but an officer in the court of Herod, who is called king, although he was only tetrarch. Some have conjectured that he was Chuza, Herod's steward, whose wife is mentioned by Luke, viii. 2, as one of the women who followed Christ, and ministered to him of their substance. But the reason assigned for that act of gratitude was the cure of some personal complaint; whereas the favour here bestowed was the cure of a child.

47. When he heard that Jesus was come out of Judæa into Galilee, he went unto him, and besought him that he would come down, and heal his son; for he was at the point of death.

By desiring Jesus to come down to Capernaum, which was at a considerable distance from Cana, while he knew his son to be at the point of death, this nobleman seems to have thought the presence of Jesus necessary to the cure. In this respect his faith seems to have been, at first at least, inferior to that of the centurion of the same place, who said to Jesus, Luke vii. 7, "Speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed;" and who therefore considered him as acting

Digitized by Google

by the power of the omnipresent Deity. The words of Jesus, in reply to the nobleman's request, may be considered as a gentle reproof to him for the want of faith.

48. Then said Jesus unto him, Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe.

Except ye see me perform the miracle, will ye not believe my abilities for that purpose? Plainly implying that there was something very unreasonable in such a temper; since he who was a divine messenger, and acted by the power of God, was able to work at a distance as well as near. The anxiety which the nobleman felt for the recovery of his son, whom he had left in such dangerous circumstances, makes him impatient at this delay.

49. The nobleman saith unto him, Sir, come down e'er my child die.

50. Jesus saith unto him, Go thy way; thy son liveth, "*is well,*" And the man believed the word that Jesus had spoken unto him, and he went his way.

The reproof conveyed in the question of Christ seems to have had its proper effect, by enlarging his apprehensions of the divine power; for he now believes that his son will be cured by the command of Christ, without his personal presence.

51. And as he was now going down his servants met him, and told him, saying, Thy son liveth.

52. Then enquired he of them the hour, "*the exact time,*" when he began

Digitized by Google

to amend; and they said unto him, Yesterday, at the seventh hour, *one o'clock in the afternoon, of our time*, the fever left him.

From the space between the time when the nobleman set out to return, which was after one o'clock in the afternoon, and that at which he met his servants, which was not till next day, it appears that there was a considerable distance between Cana and Capernaum, which may show us why our Lord chose to perform the miracle without going down thither.

53. So the father knew that it was the same hour, "*at the very time*," in which Jesus said unto him, Thy son liveth, "*Thy son is well.*" And himself believed and his whole house.

The removal of the fever, although so violent as to bring this young man to the point of death, was instantaneous, so as to leave no doubt, in the minds of any who were acquainted with the circumstances, that a miracle was wrought, and that consequently Jesus was a divine messenger.

54. This is again the second miracle that Jesus did, when he was come out of Judæa into Galilee.

That is, this is the second miracle which Jesus performed at Cana; after returning again into Galilee from Judæa; the first had been mentioned just before.

REFLECTIONS.

1. In the conduct of Christ's countrymen towards him, we see the sad effects of envy. Christ was the

Digitized by Google

most illustrious character who had ever appeared in the Jewish nation, and was an honour to the age in which he lived and to the place in which he was born and educated. The inhabitants of Nazareth might have justly valued themselves for the distinction that was shown to their city, by its being favoured with the first appearance among them of the Messiah, and of the saviour of mankind; yet, because he was the son of a carpenter, and assumed a superiority to themselves, by professing to teach others and work miracles, they are offended at him, and reject his pretensions. Thus does envy blind the understanding, as well as corrupt the heart, and render men insensible to excellence which is obvious to the eye of every impartial observer. Thus does it lead men to consider themselves as degraded by that which really does them honour, and to regard him as their enemy who is their best friend. While we are conscious that the spirit which is in us lusteth to envy, let us guard against the influence of so dishonourable and injurious a passion. Let us never forget that it rendered the inhabitants of Nazareth blind to the excellencies of the Messiah, and deprived them of the benefits of his character.

2. The cure of this young man is an illustrious proof of the miraculous powers possessed by Christ: it was performed, at several miles distance, upon a person whom he had never seen, and where, therefore, there was no shadow of a pretence for saying that there was room for collusion or imposture. It satisfied the father of the child, who left him at the point of death. It satisfied those who remained at home, and who saw how instantaneously he recovered; and it ought to satisfy us, who live in this distant age and quarter of the world, that Christ acted by divine power, although we have not been witnesses to its effects. To those who say that they will not believe in miracles, unless they see them performed, we may say, as Christ did to this officer of the court of Herod, Unless ye see signs and wonders will ye not believe? Is not the power of God equal to such an effect? Cannot the same Being who established the course of nature

Digitized by Google

alter it when he pleases, or when a necessity for such an alteration shall arise? And if such a change be possible, why should not we believe the testimony of those who say that they saw it? In trusting to the senses of other men, do we not trust to the same kind of evidence as when we rely upon our own? This arrogant spirit, which will not allow the Almighty to act but in one way, and which will admit no facts but what have been submitted to men's own eyes and ears, is plainly unreasonable. Blessed are those who have not seen, yet believe, is the language of Christ; and where there is such abundant evidence from testimony, such faith becomes rational beings, and is highly commendable.

John v. 1—16.

1. After this there was a feast, *rather*, "*a festival*," of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

As the feast of tabernacles is mentioned soon after (vii. 2.) it is probable that this was the feast of pentecost, in which the Jews commemorated the giving of the law upon mount Sinai.

2. Now there is at Jerusalem, by the sheep-market, *rather*, "*sheep gate*," a pool, "*a bath*," which is called in the Hebrew tongue Bethesda, having five porches.

The place which in our translation is called *a pool*, was a bath, the waters of which possessed, or were conceived to possess, some medicinal virtue; and persons afflicted with various diseases were accustomed to bathe themselves in it, in the hope of receiving a cure. What we call porches were porticoes, or rows of pillars supporting a roof, which afforded shelter to those who dressed

Digitized by Google

or undressed themselves, or might be intended for the convenience of shade in a hot climate to those who wished to walk. This building was called Bethesda, the meaning of which is *house of grace*, a name which might be given it in compliment to the liberality of the founder, who had erected it for public use, or perhaps in reference to the cures which were supposed to be wrought there.

This verse has been considered as containing a proof that the gospel of John was written before the destruction of Jerusalem: for the evangelist says *there is* at Jerusalem a pool or bath, which implies that Jerusalem was still standing, and shows that he wrote soon after the death of Christ.

3. In these lay a great multitude of impotent folk, *rather*, "*of infirm people*," of blind, halt, withered *.

5. And a certain man was there, which had an infirmity thirty-and-eight years.

What was the nature of his complaint does not appear; but it is evident, from what follows, that it was something which deprived him of the use of his limbs.

6. When Jesus saw him lie, and knew that he had been now a long time in that case, *or*, "*so*," he saith unto him, Wilt thou be made whole? *or*, "*Dost thou desire to be cured?*"

This question he put to him not from any doubt whether a cure would be acceptable, but to let the surrounding multitude, who were not so well acquainted with his condition as himself, see, by his answer, to

* I omit the last clause of this verse and the whole of the next, because they are not found in several manuscript copies of the New Testament; and because their genuineness is denied by several eminent critics, both in our own and in foreign countries. See Newcome's translation.

Digitized by Google

what a helpless and wretched condition he was reduced, and how certainly miraculous his cure would be. What seems to recommend him to the notice of Jesus, before the other afflicted objects who were lying here, is the great length of time that his disorder had continued.

7. The impotent man, "*the infirm man*," answered him, Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the bath; but while I am coming, another steppeth down, *or*, "*descendeth before me.*"

Although some might be able to step, others might be in as helpless a condition as himself, and require to be let down. From the man's answer it appears that he did not know Jesus, and that he expected no cure but from the healing virtue of the waters; there could, therefore, be no room for the influence of imagination.

8. Jesus saith unto him, Rise, take up thy bed, "*thy couch*," and walk.

9. And immediately the man was made whole, "*was healed*," and took up his couch, and walked: and on the same day was the sabbath.

This showed the completeness of the cure: for he who was before so infirm as to be obliged to lie down, and who could not move without assistance, is so perfectly recovered to health as to be able to rise and walk and carry his couch. The beds in eastern countries are mats, laid upon the floor; this will account for the ease with which they are carried.

10. The Jews therefore said unto him that was cured: It is the sabbath-day; it is not lawful for thee to carry thy couch.

Digitized by Google

11. He answered them, He that made me whole, "*he that made me well*," the same said unto me, Take up thy couch.

He thought that the authority of the person who wrought a miracle was sufficient, to justify him in that which the superstitious Jews deemed a violation of the sabbath.

12. Then asked they him, What man is that which said unto thee, Take up thy couch and walk.

13 And he that was made well wist not, "*knew not*," who it was: for Jesus had conveyed himself away, a multitude being in that place, *rather*, "*had withdrawn himself from the multitude in that place.*"

14. Afterward Jesus findeth him in the temple, and said unto him, Behold thou art made well. Sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee.

The man went into the temple, probably, to return thanks to God for his cure. The words of Jesus seem to imply that his disorder was brought upon him by his vices: for he warns him not to commit the same or a like crime, lest he should expose himself to a severer punishment. Or perhaps his meaning may be; be careful to avoid sin, lest thou bring upon thyself, in the judgments of another world, a much worse evil than this disorder of so long standing.

15. The man departed, and told the Jews that it was Jesus which had made him well.

Digitized by Google

His name he had learnt from some of the by-standers, not knowing Jesus himself.

16. And therefore did the Jews persecute Jesus, and sought to slay him, because he had done these things on the sabbath-day.

REFLECTIONS.

1. In the relief which was afforded to this afflicted man, and in the manner in which it was bestowed, we have a fresh proof of the excellence of Christ's character. Miraculous cures were generally performed only at the request of the diseased person; previous application was required, as a test of his faith in the divine power operating by Jesus, and of the reality of his disorder. But in the present instance the favour is bestowed before it is solicited; and what seems to have recommended this man to such an honourable distinction is the melancholy nature of his disease, which rendered him incapable of moving; the long time it had continued; and his total inability, from the want of money and friends, to procure any relief; circumstances which secured him the compassion of the benevolent Jesus, and induced him to give him assistance unasked. But that there might be no ground for suspecting that ostentation and the love of applause were the causes of this gratuitous act of beneficence, he withdraws himself from observation, as soon as it is performed. After the example of Jesus, let us do all in our power to remove or alleviate the sufferings of the afflicted, and where we cannot afford to all the benefit of our services, let us single out those who are most entitled to compassion from the length or violence of their sufferings. Nor let us always wait till our assistance is asked, but, like him, offer it of our own accord, where evidently wanted; remembering that ignorance

Digitized by Google

often prevents the afflicted from knowing the means of cure, and that virtuous modesty often pines away in wretchedness, to avoid the appearance of being forward to ask relief.

2. When we read of a man who has been afflicted with a painful disorder during forty years, how thankful should we be for the gift of health! The condition of many of us has been just the reverse of the condition of this man: we have been free from pain and sickness: have had the use of our limbs and senses and other organs, without any material interruption, for the same time that he was deprived of these blessings. Forget not your obligations, then, to divine bounty; and on every day in which you enjoy the benefit, render your praise to him who alone maketh a difference among his creatures.

3. We behold a striking instance, in the passage which has been read, of the malignant nature of superstition. Overlooking the extraordinary miracle which had just been wrought, the attention of these Jews is only attracted by the supposed violation of a ceremonial precept, and they enquire with eagerness for the person who had authorized it, not to gratify curiosity in beholding the author of so extraordinary a work; not to render him homage as a prophet and a divine messenger; but to kill him. So easy is it for men to be strictly exact in ceremonial observances, while they neglect moral duties, and to imagine themselves animated with zeal for God's law, while they are only actuated by their own malignant passions!

John v. 17—32.

17. But Jesus answered them, My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.

This is the reply which Jesus made to an accusation, brought against him by the Jews, of violating the sab-

Digitized by Google

bath, because he performed a miraculous cure on that day: he justifies his conduct by the example of the Divine Being, who works on that day as well as on others, in the common operations of nature; in bringing men to life; and in carrying on the other purposes of his beneficence in the natural world. What God thus does with his own power, Jesus thinks it right for him to do with that portion of it entrusted to himself, in order to work miracles. He calls God his Father, probably in reference to that peculiar relation in which he stood to him, as the Messiah and son of David. For God had promised to adopt a descendent of David as his son, which promise the Jews applied to Christ, who was of the seed of David, 2 Sam. vii. 13.

18. Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him; not only because he had broken the sabbath, but said also that God was his own Father, making himself equal with God, *rather*, "*like God.*"

The additional offence here given to the Jews was not so much by calling God his Father, as by claiming a right to act like him in the exercise of miraculous powers. It is to this objection, therefore, that Jesus replies, by pointing out several instances in which he now acted, or should hereafter act, like God, and showing that this ought to give them no offence, in as much as he claimed no authority to act by his own will, independently of any rule, but merely to imitate the example of his Father.

19. Then answered Jesus and said unto them, Verily, verily I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do; for what things so ever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise.

Digitized by Google

That is, You charge me with setting myself on a level with God; yet it is not to oppose his authority, but to follow his example, and therefore to concur with him in his designs; for I presume to do nothing but what I see him do.

20. For the Father loveth the Son, and showeth him, *that is*, "*showeth him how to do*," all things that himself doth, and he will show him, "*show him how to do*," greater works than these, that ye may marvel, *rather*, "*so as to make you wonder.*"

What these greater works are he immediately proceeds to inform them. The phrase *all things*, in the beginning of this verse, cannot be understood in the fullest and unlimited sense; for although the miracles of Christ are various, they cannot be supposed to be so much so as the operations of the Divine Being.

21. For as the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them, even so the Son quickeneth whom he will.

This is one of those greater works than healing the sick, which the Father would show him how to perform, to which he before refers; even raising the dead to life. The next is authority to judge mankind.

22. For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment to the Son;

By committing all judgment to the Son, we are here to understand intrusting him with a power of judging all classes of persons, the wicked as well as the good, at the last day, and of rewarding or punishing them according to their characters. With this honour, says

Digitized by Google

Jesus, God, whose prerogative it is to judge his creatures, has invested me his Son, and this is another instance in which he enables me to act like himself.

23. That all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father.

That is, honour him as well as the Father, but by no means in an equal degree. It would be strange indeed, as has been justly observed, if a son, a prophet, a person sent from God, a worshipper of God, obedient to the laws of God, who preached those laws, submitted his will to the will of God, owned his Father to be his and our only true God, died for his religion and in the cause of God, was raised from the dead by God, sits on God's right hand, intercedes with God, could possibly be conceived to expect that his disciples should honour him with the very same divine honours as they offered by his command and example to his God and their God*.

He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father, *that is*, *dishonoureth the Father*, which hath sent him.

To show disrespect to the messenger and representative of God, must arise either from being dissatisfied with the credentials of his mission, or from slighting the message which he brings; either of which is highly dishonourable to the Divine Being.

24. Verily, verily I say unto you, He that heareth my word and believeth on him, "*believeth him*," that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation, "*into judgment*," but is passed, "*hath passed*," from death unto life.

* Hopton Haynes on the person and offices of Christ, &c. p. 251. Unitarian Tracts, 1796, Vol. xi. p. 288.

Digitized by Google

That is, he that believes and obeys my gospel, or the promises of him from whom I have received it, is as sure of eternal life as if he was already possessed of it. Such a person has no occasion for a trial; for it is already determined that he shall pass from death to life.

25. Verily, verily I say unto you, the hour, "*the time*," is coming and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live, "*and when they have heard they shall live.*"

In these words Jesus refers rather more explicitly than he had done before, in the twenty-first verse, to the power of raising the dead, which he had already exercised in some instances, and intended to exercise again. These instances were to be specimens and examples of his power to raise all the dead, at the day of general resurrection. There is an allusion here to the manner in which the miracle of raising the dead was performed; for on these occasions he used his voice in calling to the dead*.

26. For as the Father hath life in himself, so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself;

As the Father hath the power of giving life, so he has also communicated to the Son the same power of giving life.

27. And hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the son of man, *or, as some render it,* "*a son of man,*" *that is, a man.*

There is a peculiar propriety in investing a man with

* Mr. Wakefield imagines that Christ here speaks of those only who are figuratively dead; dead in trespasses and sins. See his note on this verse.

Digitized by Google

the authority of a judge of the human race, since, having felt and having been tempted as a man, he will be ready to make all due allowance for human infirmities, and no one can reasonably object to his decision*.

28. Marvel not at this: for the time is coming in the which all that are in the graves, "*in the tombs*," shall hear his voice,

Christ here refers not to what he had said in the last verse, about his being invested with authority to judge mankind at the last day, but to what he had said in that preceding it, of his being endued by God with a present power of raising the dead. "Be not surprised at my possessing this power; for I shall hereafter possess one much more extraordinary, not that of raising a few persons to life, laid on a bed, or a bier for burial, like Jairus's daughter, or the son of the widow of Nain, but all that lie in their sepulchres, and have lain there for ages before:" these shall hear his voice.

29. And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation, *rather*, "*the resurrection of condemnation*," *or*, "*punishment*."

The one shall be raised to an immortal existence, the other shall be punished with unspeakable misery.

30. I can of mine own self do nothing; as I hear I judge, and my judgment is just, because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me.

* Because he is the Son of man, that is, is willing, though the Son of God, to be so seen and treated. Amner's Considerations, p. 63, and Note.

Digitized by Google

Christ is still vindicating himself from the charge of having wrought a miraculous cure on the sabbath-day, and this verse contains his arguments for that purpose. The first is, that he only followed the instructions he had received in the exercise of his miraculous powers. The second, that he could not be mistaken in interpreting these instructions; for he was not influenced by a desire of praise, or of gratifying his own inclination, but of fulfilling the will of God. Of his not performing miracles from a desire of applause, Christ had given a remarkable proof on the present occasion; for as soon as he had cured the infirm man, he withdrew from the multitude.

31. If I bear witness of myself, my witness is not true.

As Jesus says, John viii. 14, "Though I bear record of myself, yet my record is true," it has been supposed that he cannot mean to assert the direct contrary in this verse, and that the words should be translated in the form of a question, which will render them perfectly consistent with the other passages. "If I bear witness of myself, is not my witness true?" strongly implying that it was not necessarily false on that account.

REFLECTIONS.

1. We are here taught of what nature the honours claimed by Christ are; not the honours of an independent being, assuming an equality with the Almighty, but those of a man and servant of the Most High, who, being determined to aim at nothing but the glory of the great Father of all men, and never to act but as he is directed by his instructions or example, is entrusted with a portion of his own power and authority, in working miracles and delivering instructions to mankind, at present, and in raising the dead and judging

Digitized by Google

the world, hereafter. This is the honour which Christ claims to himself; and although far short of what some men have attributed to him, who have made him in every respect equal to his Father, yet it is not of a trivial nature, but the highest which a virtuous and benevolent being can wish for—the honour of being the representative of the Deity in the most engaging and illustrious part of his character, that of giving life to mankind, and bestowing upon them the most important benefits. If any persons attribute honours of a superior nature to Christ, they do it without his authority, and in opposition to his wishes; they degrade his character, while they intend to honour it, and act the part of his bitterest enemies—the unbelieving Jews.

2. The honour which Christ claims let us be careful to pay him, both in our language and conduct: to withhold it is to deprive him not only of that which is justly his due, but of that also which God intended he should enjoy as his representative and messenger; an offence of no light nature against God, and which he will not fail to punish. Supreme honours he does not desire, and expressly disclaims; but such as are becoming his character we ought to be the more ready for that reason to give. Let us honour him as a favourite of the Most High, as deserving of his Father's love, and as faithfully discharging the duties of every trust reposed in him for the benefit of the children of men.

3. Let the two most important events to which Christ here directs our attention, a general resurrection from the dead and a future judgment, be kept continually in our minds, together with the connection which subsists between obeying the gospel of Christ and the happy issues of both. That after having been laid in the grave, and having mouldered into dust, we are to have life bestowed upon us a second time, and re-appear in the creation of God, to have our characters and actions examined and decided upon by an impartial judge, for the purpose of determining whether we are fit for

Digitized by Google

an immortal existence or deserve to be condemned to punishment, is a very interesting or alarming prospect, according to the characters of the persons by whom it is entertained. To those who have done good it is the ground of joy and exultation: for it is the period when the excellence of their characters will be established by an authority which no one can dispute; when their labours in the service of God and of mankind will receive a glorious reward; when they will meet again their beloved relatives and friends, who have been fellow-labourers with them in the same cause; together with the wise and good of every quarter of the globe and of every period of time, to enjoy their society for ever. To those who have done evil it furnishes ground of serious alarm and painful apprehension: for it directs their thoughts to a time when their evil deeds will be exposed and condemned, by one of the wisest and best of the human race; who feels for them all the partialities of a benevolent heart and of a kindred nature; when they will suffer the punishment which their crimes have merited, but which the present state of being afforded no opportunities of inflicting. It becomes all, therefore, who wish to save themselves from such dreadful evils, and to realize such delightful prospects, to keep these events continually in view, as the most powerful motives to aspire after conformity to the gospel of Jesus, by which their conduct will hereafter be tried, and which promises everlasting life to all by whom it is believed and obeyed, and threatens the punishment of the second death to those by whom it is neglected.

John v. 32. to the end.

32. There is another that beareth witness of me, and I know that the witness which he witnesseth of me, "*beareth of me*," is true.

Digitized by Google

33. Ye sent unto John, and he bore witness unto the truth.

There were three sorts of evidence to which Christ appeals in this chapter for the truth of his divine mission: for that is all he endeavours to establish, and not his being the Messiah. His own testimony, that of John, and the testimony of his Father. Having just mentioned his own testimony, when he says, If I bear witness of myself is not my witness true? he proceeds to that of his forerunner. This he says he knows to be true, referring probably to the experience which he had had of the Divine spirit or power, communicating instruction to his mind and working miracles by him. Of the message of the Jews by the priests and Levites, you have an account John i. 19. In his answer, John informs them that the object of his mission was to direct their attention to another prophet, who was to succeed him, and be his superior.

34. But I receive not testimony from man, but these things I say that ye might be saved.

That is, I rest not my claim upon the testimony of men only: for I have that which is greater, even the testimony of God; but I appeal to that of John, because he was regarded as a prophet by yourselves, and I know that his testimony is respected by you; for I am willing to employ arguments of inferior force, where I think that they will induce you to believe in me, and hereby prove the means of delivering you from the evils which await you for your sins.

35. He was a burning and shining light, and ye were willing, for a season, to rejoice in his light.

This is with much propriety said of John, who was a distinguished prophet and well received, for a time, among the Jews: afterwards they suffered him to be imprisoned and beheaded without concern. Jesus

Digitized by Google

next refers to his miracles as proofs of his divine mission.

36. But I have greater witness than that of John: for the works which the Father hath given me to finish, "*to perform*," the same works that I do bear witness of me that the Father hath sent me.

37. And the Father, *or* "*so the Father*," himself, which hath sent me, hath born witness of me.

The miracles I perform are the testimony of the Father in my favour, and the strongest proof that he hath sent me: for the course of nature being established by him, it can be controlled by no other power; and since he hath altered it in the present case, it is to sanction my character as a divine teacher. But although God speaks to you in these works, you pay no attention to his voice, any more than your fathers.

Ye have neither heard his voice at any time, nor seen his shape, *or*, "*ye have neither listened to his voice at any time, nor seen his form.*"

Hearing God's voice is a familiar phrase in scripture for obeying his will, and seeing him, for observing his hand in the acts of his power. Neither of these things had the Jews done as they ought, which their history abundantly testified; and their conduct is therefore justly urged against them by Christ as matter of reproach. If the words are taken literally, they are not true: for God had spoken more than once to the Jews in an audible voice, and appeared to them in a visible form*.

* See Wakefield's translation and notes.

Digitized by Google

38. And ye have not his word abiding in you: for whom he hath sent him ye believe not.

The maxims of former revelations have no place in your minds, and produce no proper effect upon your conduct, as appears by your rejecting him who has the clearest testimonials of heaven in his favour.

39. Search the scriptures: for in them ye think ye have eternal life, *that is, directions for attaining to eternal life*; and they are they which testify of me.

40. And ye will not come to me that ye might have life.

Some persons choose to translate the first clause of these two verses not in the form of a command, but as containing a description of their conduct. "Ye search the scriptures;" and it is evident that this form corresponds better with the rest of this discourse, in which Jesus reproaches them for their behaviour, rather than gives them directions. And the ground of accusation here is that while they searched the scriptures, they were so stupid as not to perceive that he was described there; and that while they were desirous of eternal life, they would not come to him who was authorized to assure them of a future life, and to show them the way to it.

41. I receive not honour from men.

My object is not to acquire worldly honour, and therefore I do not assume that temporal power, as the Messiah, which would procure me a welcome reception among you, but appear in that humble form which exposes me to contempt, and causes me to be rejected.

42. But I know you, that ye have not the love of God in you.

Although you search the scriptures, and profess a

Digitized by Google

high regard to the authority of God, yet you have not that sincere respect for him which will incline you to submit to the intimations of his will, when contrary to your own expectations and wishes; as is the case in regard to the Messiah. This verse seems to interrupt the sense where it occurs, and therefore has been thought by some to have been misplaced, through the error of some transcriber, and to have stood originally between the thirty-ninth verse and the fortieth*. "Thus ye are searching the scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life, and they are they which testify of me: but I know you that ye have not the love of God in you, and ye will not come to me that ye might have life." It must he owned that the conjecture is plausible, but I pretend not to decide whether it be well founded.

43. I am come in my Father's name and ye receive me not.

I come in that humble form which my Father has prescribed, and on that account you reject me.

If another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive.

If another shall assume the character of the Messiah, and that temporal power and grandeur which are agreeable to his own wishes, and supposed to belong to that character, you will admit his pretensions: that they did so appears from the history of the Acts of the apostles, v. 36, 37, and from their own historian, Josephus, who tells us that before the destruction of the city, there were many pretenders to the character of the Messiah, and that they had numerous followers.

44. How can ye believe, who receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only?

Nothing can induce any one to believe in me but a

* Theological Repository, Vol. i. p. 56.

Digitized by Google

conviction of the truth of my pretensions, and a desire to obtain the approbation of God, by doing what is right; but how can ye believe in me, who wish to receive honour from men, when ye know that by avowing such a faith ye would expose yourselves to the greatest disgrace?

45. Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father.

There is no occasion for me to do it: for there is another who will accuse you sufficiently.

There is one that accuseth you, even Moses, in whom ye trust.

46. For had ye believed Moses ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me.

Jesus refers probably to such passages as these which occur in the writings of Moses, although only the latter was delivered by Moses: "In the seed of Abraham shall all the families of the earth be blessed," Genes. xii. 3; and "A prophet shall the Lord your God raise unto you like unto me," Deut. xxiii. 18. Had they considered these passages as referring to Jesus, they must have admitted his pretensions.

47. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?

I have no reason to be surprized at your disregarding my sayings, when ye neglect those of Moses, upon whose law ye build all your hopes.

REFLECTIONS.

1. From this passage of scripture we may discern the folly of not coming to Christ, or of not believing in

Digitized by Google

him, whether we regard the evidence with which he is accompanied, or the advantages which result from him. The Jews were desirous of eternal life, and examined the writings of the Old Testament in order to know how they were to attain it; but they refused to receive Christ, who was authorized by God himself to give them the most satisfactory information, and the best directions upon this subject; thus preferring a doubtful to a certain guide, and exposing themselves to a loss which could not be repaired. And there are many at the present day, who profess to think a future life desirable, and take some pains to establish their faith in it upon what they call solid reasoning, yet reject the religion of Jesus, where alone the doctrine of a future life is clearly taught, and established upon incontrovertible evidence. In doing this they prefer uncertain reasoning to the immediate testimony of God, illustrated by the evidence of facts, and abandon a sure foundation to lean upon a broken reed. Let not this folly be yours, Christians; ever keep in mind the powerful motives which claim your attachment to Christ and his gospel; in him you have life; by him you will be saved; in that gospel you have the testimony of the Divine Being to the certainty of your future hopes; but you cannot expect the same from any other quarter. Abandon not such a guide, till you can find one equally qualified to conduct you, who, while he teaches you to look for eternal life, carries with him the testimony of God and the seal of heaven.

2. We learn what is necessary to prepare men for the reception of obnoxious truth; a mind strongly tinctured with love to God, and superior to the desire of human applause. Without these requisites, in vain is it that they search the scriptures; in vain is it that they have set before them the testimony of the wisest and best of men, and even that of God himself in the performance of miracles; their prejudices will triumph over all, as appears from the case of these Jews, who, for want of this preparation, rejected the doctrine of Christ, although accompanied with every advantage which human and divine testimony could give it.

Digitized by Google

The same causes which obstructed the reception of the gospel of Christ still operate likewise to obstruct the reception of other important truths, which expose men to like trials. They cannot bring their minds to submit to doctrines which are very opposite to those which they have been taught, although attended with the clearest evidence; they cannot expose themselves to reproach and obloquy, by embracing unpopular opinions, or by joining a despised and persecuted sect, although countenanced by the oracles of truth. That there are many who reject the plain doctrines of scripture from these motives, there can be no doubt; for we have the authority of Christ for supposing it, although it might be presumption in us, who know not the hearts of men, to charge any individual with the crime. This consideration furnishes ground of serious caution and alarm to us all. What we call commendable zeal in opposing error may be no more than obstinate prejudice, and a selfish concern to preserve our reputation. Let us endeavour to guard ourselves from so fatal a mistake, by learning to consider the approbation of God as the highest honour which we can enjoy, and to despise the favour of men, wherever it interferes with the dictates of truth and conscience.

John vi. 1—21.

1. After these things Jesus went over the sea of Galilee, *rather*, "*by the side of the sea of Galilee*," which is the sea of Tiberias, *which was called by that name.*

As the discourse of Christ in the last chapter was delivered in Jerusalem, and we here find him all at once in Galilee, at a great distance from Jerusalem, traversing the sea coast, without his removal thither, or any of the circumstances which attended it being mentioned, it has been supposed, with great probability,

Digitized by Google

by some commentators, that this chapter is out of its place, and that it ought to have followed, or rather, did originally follow, the fourth, which concludes with mentioning that Jesus came out of Judæa into Galilee. If this change be admitted, every thing will appear regular and connected. The fourth leaves Jesus in Galilee; this, which should have followed it, describes several transactions which took place while he was there. The fifth mentions his ascent to Jerusalem to a festival, his cure of the infirm man at the bath of Bethesda, the offence which it gave to the Jews, because performed upon the sabbath, and his vindication of his conduct; and the seventh mentions his return to Galilee, because the Jews sought to kill him: but without the before mentioned change, there will appear to be great confusion in the history.

2. And a great multitude followed him, because they saw his miracles, which he did on them that were diseased.

3. And Jesus went up into a mountain, and there he sat with his disciples.

The motive of Jesus for retreating to a mountain was probably to withdraw himself from the crowd, who might be disposed to be turbulent: many would not be inclined to follow him into a desert place.

4. And the passover, a feast of the Jews, was nigh.

This whole verse is supposed by Bishop Pearce to be an interpolation, introduced here by the mistake of some early transcriber, and afterwards retained in succeeding copies: for it has no connection with any thing that goes before or follows it in this chapter. A presumptive argument of the same kind is also derived from the silence of some of the early ecclesiastical writers

Digitized by Google

respecting this passage; whereas if they were acquainted with it, it could not fail to be noticed by them *. It is from this verse that the most plausible argument has been drawn for proving that our Lord's ministry lasted during three years, since it extended to three passovers: but if the verse be spurious, the inference cannot be well founded.

5. When Jesus then lift up his eyes, and saw a great company come, "*coming*," unto him, he saith unto Philip, Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat?

6. And this he said to prove him, "*to try him:*" for he himself knew what he would do, "*for he had determined what to do.*"

This question seems to have been put to Philip in particular, rather than to any other of the apostles, because he stood more in need of instruction than they, but yet was confident of his knowledge, John xiv. 8, 9. The answer which was made to the question of Christ served also to show how large the multitude was, and how much bread it would be necessary to provide for them.

7. Philip answered him, Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little.

Two hundred pennies make about six pounds nine shillings and two-pence of our money. This sum, in Philip's apprehension, would not purchase bread enough for such a multitude, so as to afford each individual ever so little: it would not have procured enough

* Irenæus.

Digitized by Google

for two thousand persons; whereas there were here five thousand.

8. One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, saith unto him,

9. There is a lad here, which hath five barley loaves, and two small fishes, but what are they among so many?

Five loaves, which a boy could carry, must have been very small, and totally inadequate to the purpose of feeding such a multitude.

10. And Jesus said, Make the men sit down.

This he ordered, that they might be served with more order, and that they might more easily be numbered.

Now there was much grass in the place, *which made it convenient for them to sit down*; so the men sat down, in number about five thousand.

They were enabled to number them, because they sat down, as we learn from the other evangelists, in separate companies, each consisting of one hundred and fifty.

11. And Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks he distributed to the disciples, and the disciples to them that were set down, and likewise of the fishes, as many as they would, "*as much as they chose.*"

12. When they were filled, "*satisfied,*" he said to his disciples, Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost.

Digitized by Google

13. Therefore, *or*, "*so*," they gathered them together, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves, which remained over and above unto them that had eaten.

Fragments which filled twelve baskets contained more bread than the original quantity, which was only five loaves: there must therefore have been a creation of bread upon this occasion; an effect which could only be produced by divine power.

14. Then those men, when they had seen the miracle that Jesus did, said, This is of a truth that prophet, "*that teacher*," that should come into the world.

It seems they conceived that their Messiah was to be both a teacher and a temporal prince at the same time; and this extraordinary miracle led them to conclude that Jesus was the person who was to unite these two characters.

15. When Jesus therefore perceived that they would come and take him by force, to make him a king, he departed again into a mountain, "*into the mountain*," himself alone.

This was the mountain mentioned in the third verse of this chapter, and to the foot of which he had descended to feed the multitude. Matthew and Mark speak of his retiring to the mountain to pray; but that reason is not inconsistent with that mentioned by John. Having retired in order to frustrate the design of the multitude, he then spent the time in prayer.

16. And when evening was now

Digitized by Google

come, his disciples went down unto the sea,

This they did by the direction of Jesus, as appears from Matthew.

17. And entered into a ship, and went over the sea, *that is*, "*along the sea*," towards Capernaum, *for this town lay at the end of the lake, and not on the other side*; and it was now dark, and Jesus was not come to them.

18. And the sea arose, by reason of a great wind that blew.

19. So when they had rowed about five and twenty or thirty furlongs, they see Jesus walking on the sea, and drawing nigh unto the ship; and they were afraid.

They did not know it to be Jesus, and imagined that it was a spirit, as the other evangelists inform us.

20. But he saith unto them, It is I; be not afraid.

21. Then they willingly received him into the ship, and immediately the ship was at the land whither they went.

Without any further interruption from the storm, and perhaps sooner than could be expected, in consequence of being driven by the wind.

Digitized by Google

REFLECTIONS.

1. In the two miracles which are here recorded we see an illustrious display of divine power. In the one we behold that unstable element which yields to every impression, and suffers no heavier body to remain on its surface, becoming solid under the feet of Jesus; and, violently agitated by the wind in one part, in another affording him a firm and safe path to walk upon; thus showing the power of God to suspend and control the usual course of nature. In the other miracle we behold five thousand men, besides women and children, who must have amounted at least to an equal number, making a full repast, apparently upon five small loaves and two fishes, so small that a child was able to carry them, but, in reality, upon additional loaves and fishes, which God had created for the occasion: for what but a new creation could produce at once food enough for ten thousand human beings, at the foot of a desert mountain? Well might the multitude who partook of this repast be astonished at the manner in which it was provided, and justly did they conclude that the person who was honoured with the ability of performing so unparalleled a miracle, must be the greatest prophet whom the world ever saw, even the true Messiah. Vain also is the presumption of those men who tell us that there never was such a thing as creation, that the universe has no intelligent author, and that from eternity there has been the same succession of causes and effects as we now observe. For here we behold the Creator himself performing, as it were, an act of creation, in the presence and before the eyes of his offspring, and hereby furnishing an everlasting refutation to the language of atheists.

2. The direction which Christ gave respecting the fragments, affords us a useful lesson of instruction: for it teaches us that although Heaven bestow upon

Digitized by Google

men frequently more than they immediately need, yet it is not its intention that what appear superfluities should be wasted and lost, but that they should be carefully laid up for a future time, to supply our own wants, or those of our poor brother, to whom God has been less bountiful. When therefore you have provided a plentiful meal for your friends, as Jesus did for this multitude, in the midst of profusion be careful as he was that there be no unnecessary waste: let the fragments of the feast be laid up for some of the uses just mentioned. When Heaven favours you with a plentiful harvest, and you rejoice, as you may well do, in the divine bounty, take care to use with œconomy what Heaven bestows so abundantly, and let not present extravagance prepare the way for a future scarcity.

3. The passage which I have been explaining illustrates in a striking manner the excellence of Christ's character; for he shows himself most humble when he appeared to have the greatest reason for being elated, and resists, without difficulty, temptations of the most powerful nature. When surrounded by a crowd of astonished and applauding spectators, he withdraws from their presence, to spend the time in prayer; when offered a crown by those who would have been proud to become his subjects, he rejects it with disdain. Assured of a plentiful subsistence, under the care of one who could multiply bread at pleasure, and persuaded that such a leader could conduct them to victory and conquest, not only over the Romans, but over the whole world, the Jews are eager to confer upon him royal honours, and to place him at the head of an army. But these earthly honours have no charms in the eyes of the Saviour: what he was intent upon was to fulfil the great purposes of his mission, in the instruction of mankind, and to secure to himself a crown of eternal glory in heaven. So carefully had he attended to the design of that part of the temptation in the wilderness where he was offered all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them! And so fully has he justified the language of an apostle, that he was tempted in all points as we are, yet without sin!

Digitized by Google

John vi. 22—40.

22. The day following, when the people, "*when the multitude*," which stood on the other side of the sea, "*which had been by the side of the sea*," saw that there was no other boat there, save that one whereinto his disciples were entered, and that Jesus went not with his disciples into the boat, but that his disciples were gone away alone,

The multitude whom Christ fed with five loaves and two fishes, were prevented from following the disciples the same night, in their passage along the side of the lake, because they were not furnished with boats; but the next verse informs us how they were enabled to follow them the next day. The evangelist seems here likewise to have intended to inform us of the reason why the multitude were surprised to see Jesus where they found him, because there were no boats to transport him thither, except those in which themselves or his disciples went.

23. (Howbeit there came other boats from Tiberias*, nigh unto the place where they did eat bread, after that the Lord had given thanks.)

24. When the people, "*multitude*," therefore saw that Jesus was not there, neither his disciples, they also took

* Or, Of Tiberias. See Wakefield.

Digitized by Google

shipping, and came to Capernaum, seeking for Jesus*.

25. And when they had found him by the side of the sea, they said unto him, Rabbi, "*Teacher*," when camest thou hither?

Jesus does not choose to gratify their curiosity, by informing them that he came thither without the assistance of a boat, by walking in a miraculous manner upon the water; nor does he, as they probably expected, commend their zeal in following him; but intimates to them that they must be actuated by different views, before they could be such followers as he should approve and encourage.

26. Jesus answered them and said, Verily, verily I say unto you, Ye seek me not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled.

You follow me not because you are convinced, by the miracle which you have seen, that I am a divinely authorized teacher, but because you have had a plentiful meal, and expect to enjoy the same favour frequently in my company.

27. Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life,

That is, labour not so much for food the use of which is temporary, as for that food the effects of which are eternal, producing and supporting an ever-

* This could only be a part of the multitude: for it is not to be supposed that five thousand persons could find boats enow at one place to transport them.

Digitized by Google

lasting existence; meaning hereby the doctrines of the gospel.

Which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed, *rather*, "*for to him hath the Father, even God, set his seal.*"

This last clause refers to the miracles of Christ, which gave him the authority of God for teaching, in the same manner as a prince setting his seal to a writing, gives to that writing authority to convey his sentiments.

28. Then said they unto him, What shall we do, that we might work the works of God?

The works of God are such things as he has required, and as are acceptable to him; and the Jews desire to know what those things are which they must do to obtain the divine favour, the answer to which is contained in the next verse.

29. Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, *such work as he requires*, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.

That ye believe *him* to have a divine commission to teach mankind, who shows you by his miracles that he has received one, and now claims your attention to his instructions.

30. They said therefore unto him, What sign showest thou then, that we may see and believe thee? What doest thou work?

That is, What miracle dost thou perform? Show it to us, that, seeing it, we may believe that God hath sent thee.

Digitized by Google

31. Our fathers did eat manna in the desert, as it is written, He gave them bread from heaven to eat.

This is a quotation from the Psalms: "Because they," that is, the Jews, "believed not in God, and trusted not in his salvation, though he had commanded the clouds from above, and opened the doors of heaven, and had rained down manna upon them to eat, and had given them of the corn of heaven." Ps. lxxviii. 22—24.

It seems extraordinary that those who had seen the miracle of feeding five thousand men with a very few loaves should require any fresh evidence to prove that Jesus was a divinely authorized teacher. They seem to admit that he had wrought this miracle, but at the same time to express a wish that he would work some miracle in the clouds, to prove that he was the Messiah, like that which Moses performed in giving them manna. The Pharisees and Sadducees had the same idea, when they said to Jesus, Show us a sign from heaven, Matt. xvi. 1. This temper discovered so much obstinacy and perverseness, that Jesus gives designedly obscure answers to their questions, intending hereby to discourage such men from becoming his disciples, and to disgust and drive them away. This will account for the difficulties which occur in the remaining parts of the chapter.

32. Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven.

If the word *true* be understood with bread in the first instance, as well as in the second, it will render the sense of this verse more clear. For instance: "Moses gave you not that true bread from heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread from hea-

Digitized by Google

ven." That is, the bread which Moses gave you did not deserve to be called the bread of heaven; for it was of a material nature, and supported a perishing life; but what my Father now gives you, in the doctrine which I preach, is of a spiritual nature, supports an everlasting life, and therefore justly merits the denomination of the bread of heaven.

33. For the bread of God, *such as he is ready to acknowledge as his*, is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world.

By this description Jesus evidently means himself, whom he might very well speak of as coming down from heaven; not on account of a personal and local descent; for Jesus, including the whole man, the body as well as the mind, had never yet been in heaven; but because he had a commission thence. The way in which Jesus gives life to the world, is by teaching the doctrine of eternal life, which proves the means of an everlasting existence.

34. Then said they unto him, Lord, "*Master*," evermore give us this bread.

This bread bears such honourable names, being called the bread of God and the bread of heaven, and produces such important effects, giving life to the world, that they earnestly request they may be always filled with it.

35. Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life; he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.

To come to Christ and to believe in him, which occur in this verse, signify the same thing as do likewise the terms hunger and thirst; for they both signify the want of a fresh supply. There is a reference here to the manna of which he had been before speaking: he

Digitized by Google

who ate of that food would soon want a fresh supply; but he who was acquainted with the doctrine of Christ would want no other to enable him to live for ever. The words may also be considered as an answer to the request in the preceding verse, "Master, evermore give us this bread," that is, a constant supply; to which he answers, Having enjoyed it once, you will need nothing more.

36. But I said unto you that ye also have seen me, and believe not.

That is, You have seen the miracle which I performed; that of feeding the five thousand; but you believe not the testimony it bears of me. This he had in reality told them in the twenty-sixth verse, when he said that they sought him, not because they saw the miracle, but because they ate of the loaves and were filled. Yet although you believe not in me, there are others who will.

37. All that the Father giveth me shall come to me, and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.

That is, every one that the Father disposeth to believe in me shall do so; and him who thus believeth in me, and professes himself my disciple, I will by no means reject. The allusion here seems to be to the practice of a father bringing his child to a master for instruction. Those who thus come to me, says Christ, I will by no means turn away, of whatever nation or country they may be, although Gentiles and idolaters. To do so, would be to defeat the object of my mission.

38. For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will but the will of him that sent me.

The latter clause of this verse explains the meaning of the former. To be sent by God, it is evident, signifies the same thing as coming down from heaven; but as that phrase implies no more than having a commis-

Digitized by Google

sion from God to instruct mankind, so neither can the other.

39. And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given, *whom he hath disposed to be my disciples*, I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day.

He here explains why he had called himself the bread of life; it is because he had authority to give eternal life to all his disciples, without the exception of any class of men or individual persons. What he means by losing nothing he more fully explains in the next verse.

40. And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son and believeth on him, may have everlasting life, and I will raise him up at the last day.

By losing nothing it appears that Christ meant suffering none of them, whether Gentiles or Jews, to be lost by remaining in the grave. In opposition to this, he declares that it was the will of God that all, without distinction, should enjoy eternal life, by being raised from the dead at the last day.

REFLECTIONS.

1. How mean and groveling does the character of these Jews appear! They had seen a few loaves and fishes miraculously multiplied, so as to furnish sufficient provision for ten thousand persons, of all ages

Digitized by Google

and sexes; yet they do not believe the person by whom this miracle is performed to be a divine messenger; they set no value upon the evidence which they have already received, but require something greater and more extraordinary. They follow not Christ to hear his divine instructions, to behold his excellent virtues, and to copy his illustrious example; nor to improve their minds in religious knowledge, in the love and practice of goodness; but that they may eat again and be filled; that they may obtain a plentiful meal, without the trouble of labouring for it. Such are the views and motives of these men. Justly does Christ throw every discouragement in their way, to prevent them from becoming his disciples and followers: to make such proselytes, was not the object of his ministry, nor, however numerous, could they do him any honour.

But their characters are by no means singular: there are many who still profess themselves the followers of Christ, only for the sake of the loaves and fishes; who are attached to Christianity because it furnishes them with honourable employments, or with the means of plentiful subsistence. Let such men, however, know that Christ values not their attachment, and wishes them not to rank themselves with his disciples. Listen to the admonition which he gives you, not to make the support of this frail animal existence, the main object of your lives; learn from his language the folly of preferring an object of small consequence to one of infinite moment. Let a future existence engage your principal care and solicitude; and attend to the support and comfort of the present life only as a secondary object; as the means of securing to yourselves another and a better. If you do this, you will not fail to set a high value upon Christ, who is the bread of life; whose doctrines inform you of a future life; whose precepts contain sure directions for obtaining it, and who is himself authorized to bestow it upon all those who believe in and obey him.

Let us guard against that unreasonable humour

Digitized by Google

which disposes men to be dissatisfied with good evidence for the truth of the gospel, and to require what they imagine to be something better, when what they already have is sufficient. Such a disposition proved the ruin of the Jews, and will likewise prove the ruin of all those who tread in their footsteps. It is the plan of Divine Providence, in regard to the principles of natural as well as those of revealed religion, to furnish such proof as will convince every candid and unprejudiced inquirer. To look for more, is an unreasonable expectation, which God is justified in disappointing.

2. From the words of Christ let all men take encouragement to profess themselves his disciples, and to persevere in his service; for he will reject none; he will suffer none to perish. Come hither then all ye sons of Adam, in whatever clime living, by whatever colour distinguished, in whatever condition placed; whether you be European or African; whether you be rich or poor; learned or ignorant; plebeian or noble; bond or free; honoured or despised; whether your sins be of a greater or less enormity! You are all welcome to Christ, if you come with a true faith in him, and with a sincere desire to be instructed and directed by his gospel. You are all equally entitled to the privileges of Christianity; you are all heirs of its promises, if you comply with its demands. Be not discouraged, thou wretched outcast of society, who art shunned by thy brethren, and who dependest for the bread which perishes upon the bounty of others! The bread of life is offered to thee, as freely as to the most opulent. Thou grievous offender against divine and human laws, who art afraid that thy sins are too great to be pardoned, be not overwhelmed with a sense of thy guilt; there is mercy for thee, if thou repent!

John vi. 41—59.

41. The Jews then murmured at

Digitized by Google

him, because he said, I am the bread which came down from heaven.

42. And they said, Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How is it then that he saith, I came down from heaven?

In the preceding verses we find that the Jews, who had been fed by Jesus with a miraculous supply of bread, were led to mention to him the manna given from heaven to their fathers in the wilderness. Hence he took occasion to call himself the bread of God, which cometh down from heaven; intending no more hereby than to express his being sent by God in heaven, but using this metaphorical language in order to disgust and drive away men who, he knew, followed him with no other view than that of gratifying their sensual appetites. In this design he appears to have been successful: for the Jews, understanding him to speak literally, could not reconcile his saying that he came down from heaven, with what they knew of his being descended from human parents, like the rest of mankind. They were therefore offended with his declarations, as inconsistent with truth. Jesus takes no pains to reconcile the seeming contradiction, but endeavours to appease the contention which he perceived to be springing up among the people who followed him; some of them maintaining that he was a divine teacher, while others denied it.

43. Jesus therefore answered and said unto them, Murmur not among yourselves.

That is, Quarrel not with one another on this subject.

44. No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me

Digitized by Google

draw him; and I will raise him up at the last day.

Contend not too eagerly with those who reject me; for none can become my disciples but those whom God hath inclined to do so, by giving them just views of himself. If, therefore, my followers be few, it is the will of Heaven that this should be the case. The last clause of the verse, "And I will raise him up at the last day," Bishop Pearce supposes to be an interpolation, on account of its having no connection with the rest of the verse, and interrupting the course of reasoning. If it be genuine, it must be regarded as an assurance on the part of Christ of the great things which he will do for those few who become his disciples. The *drawing* here spoken of does not imply violence or compulsion, but only such influence as arises from knowledge, and consists in the force of motives.

45. It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God.

That is, all shall be instructed by God in the times of the gospel; although it will still depend upon their own will whether that instruction shall produce its proper effect. Our Lord is here supposed to refer to two passages in the prophets, Is. liv. 13, where God, speaking by the prophet of the favoured condition of the Jews at a future period, says, "And all thy children shall be taught of the Lord:" and Jer. xxxi. 34, "And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord; for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest, saith the Lord." The teaching referred to by our Lord in these passages signifies no more than advantages for acquiring knowledge, and not knowledge actually acquired: for it appears from the next clause that some refused to receive what was offered to them.

Every man therefore, that hath heard and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me.

Digitized by Google

Every one who heareth the instructions of the Father, so as to observe them, will become my disciple; but the number of such is small. Lest any one should imagine that by hearing and learning of the Father he meant immediate communications from heaven, such as a scholar receives from the mouth of a master, he takes care to add that this was a privilege peculiar to himself.

46. Not that any man hath seen the Father, save he which is of God, *or*, "*from God*," he hath seen the Father.

Other persons were instructed by the doctrine and miracles of inspired men, but Jesus, by personal intercourse with the Deity.

47. Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life.

The faith here referred to must be a practical faith; for it is to that alone that eternal life is promised in other parts of the gospel.

48. I am that bread of life, *or*, "*the bread of life*."

49. Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead.

50. This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof and not die.

51. I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If any man eat of this bread he shall live for ever.

The Jews who now followed Christ were offended with him for saying that he came down from heaven; yet we find that he here repeats the expression, without

Digitized by Google

taking any pains to explain it; whence it appears that he did not wish to give them satisfaction by removing their difficulties, but rather intended to disgust them, and to drive them away; plainly perceiving that these men followed him not for the sake of instruction, but for the purpose of gratifying their appetites, and that he should derive no honour from such disciples. This design is still more evident from the words which follow, in which there are expressions still more figurative and harsh than in the preceding verses. In the preceding language, however, there is nothing which may not be easily understood by those who consider the occasion on which it was used, and the claim which Christ laid to a divine mission, and whose minds are not wholly sunk in sensuality like these Jews. For, to come from heaven, is the same thing as coming from God. Nor is there any material difference in the sense, when the phrase is altered to coming down or descending from heaven; for it may be only an allusion to the supposed situation of heaven, which is conceived to be above us; or to the high authority by which Jesus acted: for he who brings a message from a superior Being, or superior place, is in common language said to come down from that person or place, although there has been in fact no real descent. So Christ, who was sent from God, may be said to come down from heaven, although he received his commission in the world, and was never out of it till he was taken up after his resurrection. But to men who did not consider that Christ professed to come from God, and looked for nothing but a literal meaning in his words, this language was unintelligible. He now proceeds to give them something still more perplexing to their narrow minds.

And the bread that I will give is my flesh, *or*, "*my body*," which I will give for the life of the world.

52. The Jews therefore strove amongst themselves, saying, How can this man give us his flesh to eat?

Digitized by Google

To us, who know that Christ voluntarily laid down his life upon the cross, in order that he might be raised from the dead, and might hereby establish the doctrine of a resurrection to eternal life to all the righteous, and that he furnishes men with the best motives for observing that conduct which will be rewarded with eternal life, it is easy to understand how Christ gave his flesh, or his body, which is the same thing, for the life of the world. But that expression could not well be comprehended by those who knew nothing of the future death of Christ, and of the happy consequences which would result from it.

53. Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you.

As if he had said, I have already told you that my death will be the means of salvation to mankind; I now add that if that death, which must be accomplished by violent means, so as to occasion the shedding of my blood, should be so unpalatable and offensive to you, as to prevent you from believing in me, and to drive you from me, you will not partake of that eternal life which I procure for my followers.

54. Whoso eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day.

That is, whosoever is not offended with my violent death, but believes in me, shall be intitled to eternal life. The preceding verse threatened death to the unbeliever; this promises life to the believer.

55. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed, *rather*, **"** ***my flesh is true meat, and my blood is***

Digitized by Google

true drink;" in opposition to common meat and drink.

My death, especially my violent death, when properly considered, in all its consequences, will be the source of a better life than that which common food supports.

56. He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood dwelleth in me, *or*, "*is in me*," and I in him, *or*, "*as I am in him.*"

That is, as I am in the person who eats my flesh and drinks my blood, so he is in me; by which language Christ means no more than that there is as intimate an union between himself and his disciples as there is between the thing eaten and the body into which it is received.

57. As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father, so he that eateth me even he shall live by me.

As God hath given me life, so I give life to those that believe in me, and hereby confer upon others a like benefit to that which has been conferred upon me.

58. This is the bread which came down from heaven; *this alone deserves the name of bread from heaven*; not as your fathers did eat manna and are dead; he that eateth of this bread shall live for ever.

59. These things said he in the synagogue, as he taught in Capernaum.

Digitized by Google

REFLECTIONS.

1. What reason have we to be thankful that in these times we are all taught of God; that we are not left to collect our duty and expectations from the slow, painful and uncertain exertions of our own minds; or from the contradictory opinions of the admired sages of Greece or Rome; or from the boasted maxims laid down by the pretenders to wisdom in modern times; but have in our hands an authentic account of what God has taught respecting himself, his character, administration and future designs! Let us not be insensible to the value of this privilege, which makes the meanest believer of the present day a better informed man, upon the subject of religion, than the ablest speculatists of ancient or modern times: let us not desert so excellent an instructor, to follow these uncertain guides, which will leave us totally inexcusable; but carefully attend to the instructions which we receive, remembering that they can lead us to nothing but what is right and good.

2. The considerations which Christ suggests to his disciples, for their consolation under the open rejection of his gospel, are equally deserving of our attention in the present day, when so many of our neighbours or acquaintance are acting in like manner. It is the will of God that it should be so; none can embrace Christianity and come to Christ but those whom the Father disposes to do so, and none reject him but those whom he permits to overlook the strong and various evidence in favour of revelation. If, therefore, we hear the character of Jesus vilified; if we see his precepts ridiculed and despised; let us endeavour, as far as we are able, by reason and argument, to undeceive such mistaken men; but let not our eager desire for the prevalence of truth betray us into any intemperate warmth in its defence; nor let us be discouraged, if our efforts

Digitized by Google

should prove ineffectual. The defection and opposition of modern unbelievers may be as useful to Christianity in future times, and as necessary for accomplishing the benevolent purposes of Divine Providence respecting it, as the general rejection of it by the Jews was in the beginning. Let us, therefore, acquiesce in the will of God, however opposite to our own wishes.

3. Let us endeavour to secure to ourselves the important benefits which are annexed to believing in Christ. There is much metaphor, and some degree of obscurity, in his language on this occasion; but his general meaning is easily understood. Eternal life is repeatedly promised to all those who believe and obey his gospel; or, which is the same thing, who believe in his death and resurrection. But this is a benefit which we cannot expect to be conferred upon us without our own endeavours. We must hear so as to learn of the Father. Much pains are requisite, in order to meditate upon the grounds and objects of faith; to practise what the gospel enjoins, and to avoid what it forbids. Yet, whatever such services may cost, the glorious prize will more than reward our labours.

John vi. 60. to the end.

60. Many therefore of his disciples, when they had heard this, *or, "heard these things," i. e. several things before mentioned*, said, This is an hard saying, who can hear it? *Who can bear to hear it with patience?*

What they seem to have found hard to understand, was principally how they were to eat the flesh and drink the blood of a living man, and how this was to give them eternal life; as appears from Christ furnishing them with a key to this part of his discourse in

Digitized by Google

verse sixty-three. The persons who were thus perplexed by his language were not the twelve apostles, but some persons who had shown an inclination to become his followers.

61. When Jesus knew in himself that his disciples murmured at it, he said unto them, Doth this offend you?

62. What and if ye shall see the son of man ascend up where he was before?

It has been supposed by many that Christ here refers to his ascension into heaven, after his resurrection from the dead, and to his having been already in heaven, before he was born into the world; but it is not conceivable how being witnesses of this ascension should offend his disciples, much less offend them more grievously than the language he had just been using, as the words imply. Besides, if the real ascension of Christ was referred to, as that was the ascension of the whole person, of the body and of the mind, the being in heaven must also include as much, that is, the existence of the body there as well as of the mind: but this is contrary to the faith of those who have recourse to this interpretation: for they suppose that it was only the pre-existent spirit of Christ which was in heaven before he appeared in our world.

I do not see, therefore, how any consistent meaning can be given to these words, but by supposing that the language is metaphorical, like the rest of Christ's discourse with these Jews; and that he only meant to intimate that he could say things more offensive and perplexing than any which he had yet delivered. He had been telling these sensual and ignorant Jews, who followed him for the sake of the loaves and fishes, that he was the true bread from heaven, and that if they expected to live, they must even eat of his flesh and drink of his blood. This was strong metaphorical

Digitized by Google

language, certainly, and the last part of it seems to approach to harshness: for although it was sufficiently common for the Jewish teachers to speak of wisdom and instruction under the image of bread and wine, and although Christ himself says that he is a *vine*, a *door*, and a *way*, without much danger of becoming unintelligible, or of being misunderstood, because the literal sense was evidently absurd, and therefore the transition to the metaphorical easy, yet, since to eat the flesh and drink the blood of a living man is not in its own nature impossible, the literal meaning is here not excluded, and his hearers might easily be led to suppose that his words were to be so understood, and therefore be offended with them. Christ, observing this offence taken by his followers, in consequence of their understanding literally what he had spoken metaphorically, naturally used such language as this; "Does this offend you? this slight difficulty? What if I should tell you, as I easily could, something that should appear more extraordinary and perplexing? What if I should rise in my discourse into the divine counsels, as I have done already on former occasions, and before other hearers, and display to you some of the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven?" This is all I understand by the words "ascending up where he had been before, or already;" and I think that they bear a near resemblance to his language on another occasion, and may be illustrated by it: thus, when Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews, was offended because Christ told him that a man must be born again before he could enter into the kingdom of heaven, Jesus replies, John iii. 12, 13, "If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe if I tell you of heavenly things? And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the son of man which is in heaven." In respect to these last words, I have already shown you, that being in heaven is only a figurative expression for being acquainted with the divine counsels. Ascending up to heaven, therefore, according to this interpretation, can mean no more than making use of the knowledge thence received, and ascending up, in the

Digitized by Google

passage now under consideration, is only the same expression a little shortened. It signifies the same thing as teaching men heavenly things. It is hardly necessary to add that *seeing*, for *observing with the mind*, is a common figure of speech in all languages.

63. It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you they are spirit and they are life.

These words are intended by Christ as a key to most of the obscurities in the preceding discourse, particularly to what he had said about his being the bread from heaven, and of the necessity of eating his flesh. These things the Jews understood literally: but he now intimates that he had a spiritual meaning, and that it was the figurative sense of his words, intended to express his doctrine, which could alone produce and support a spiritual life; and that his flesh would be of no use for this purpose. From Peter's answer, verse sixty-eight, "Thou hast the words of eternal life," it appears that he understood the figurative meaning of his words, and rightly conceived him to speak of his doctrine.

64. But there are some of you that believe not (for Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray him.)

It was revealed to Christ, from the beginning of his ministry, which of his disciples were sincere converts, and which of them were not so; and particularly, who it was that would deliver him up. This made him take so little pains to explain himself, and be so indifferent about giving them offence: his explanations would have produced no effect upon men who were not at all inclined to believe in him.

65. And he said, Therefore said I unto you that no man can come unto

Digitized by Google

me, except it were given unto him of my Father.

These words seem to be a continuation of what Christ had been saying in the beginning of the preceding verse: he had there observed that there were some who did not believe in him; he now assigns the reason of a former declaration in the forty-fourth verse, where he had said that no man could come unto him, except it were given to him of his Father; that is, unless God would incline his heart to do so, not by supernatural but ordinary means.

66. From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him.

They were so disgusted with the figurative language which Christ had used, and which they could not comprehend, that they would continue with him no longer; and Jesus, perceiving their sensual disposition, and that he should derive no credit from such followers, took no pains to retain them. I think indeed it is clear from the whole of this discourse, that he intended to drive them away: for he seems to have given himself no trouble to remove their difficulties, but, on the contrary, when they were perplexed with the strong language which he had used, he made use of still stronger.

67. Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away?

68. Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.

Jesus had told his followers that those who eat his flesh and drink his blood should have eternal life: in this language he referred to his doctrine, and to this Peter, it seems, understood him to refer; for the motive which he assigns for attachment to him is that he had the words, or the doctrine, of eternal life.

Digitized by Google

69. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, *or*, "*the Christ*," the son of the living God,

The other followers of Jesus were offended with him, because he had said that he came down from heaven, when they knew that he had a father and mother like other men: but Peter understands no more by this expression than that he claimed a divine commission, and was the promised Messiah. You see from this verse, what indeed is evident from many other examples, that Christ and Son of God are terms signifying the same thing.

70. Jesus answered them, Have I not chosen you twelve, *rather*, "*Did I not choose you, the twelve, for myself*," and one of you is a devil, *rather*, "*false accuser*," *or*, "*slanderer.*"

So the term *devil* is translated in the epistles of Paul; and there can be no doubt that Judas was something more, or intended being something more, than a mere betrayer of his master, and that he purposed justifying his own conduct by accusing him of some crime. This purpose, however, he was prevented from executing by his intervening repentance.

71. He spake of Judas, the son of Simon: for he it was that should betray him, *rather*, "*that was going to betray him*," being one of the twelve.

REFLECTIONS.

1. We have here a fresh instance of the excellence of Christ's character, in his showing himself superior to

Digitized by Google

popular applause. The miracles which he wrought drew after him many followers; and if he had chosen to gratify their humours, and accommodate himself to their prejudices, they would have continued with him. To be accompanied every where by a multitude of professed disciples, although they were of the lower classes of mankind, would have given him distinction, and have flattered his vanity, if he had possessed any; at least, it would have afforded him some consolation for the want of proselytes among the higher orders of the Jews, among the members of the Sanhedrim, the scribes and pharisees: but Christ had a mind superior to the love of praise or applause, from whatever quarter it might come, whether from the rich or the poor. Often have we heard him use the most offensive language, in respect to persons of power and influence among the Jews, exposing their hypocrisy and reproving their vices, without reserve, and hereby showing himself indifferent about their favour: here we find him equally unconcerned about the favour of the multitude: for he refuses to work a fresh miracle to supply them with bread, which he knew was what they desired, and has recourse to such figurative language as he was aware they would not understand, and at which they would take offence; thus proving, by his conduct towards both, that the object which he had in view was not the gratification of pride or vanity, or any of those passions which usually actuate mankind, in proposing a false religion to the world; but the fulfilment of the purposes of Providence, by a faithful discharge of his office.

2. Let us never forget that we have the same motives for attachment to Christ which Peter and the twelve apostles had. He has the words of eternal life: he alone can give us satisfactory information respecting a state of being after death, and suitable directions for attaining it. The notions entertained by the heathens upon this subject were full of obscurity and uncertainty, and the Jewish scriptures, although they plainly discover that the sacred writers believed the doctrine, yet convey no certain information concerning it.

Digitized by Google

Were the light of the gospel to be withdrawn, mankind would be soon involved again in the same uncertainty. When, therefore, we are at any time tempted to forsake Christ by renouncing his gospel, and by violating any of its precepts; let us ask ourselves as Peter does, To whom shall we go? Where shall we find like information? Where shall we meet with so good a guide; with so excellent a master? and let the answer which must be given to this question determine us to continue with him.

John vii. 1—13.

1. After these things, *or*, "*after this*," Jesus walked in Galilee: for he would not walk in Jewry, "*Judæa*," because the Jews sought to kill him.

The principal enemies of Christ were the Pharisaic scribes, or teachers of the law, who resided in Jerusalem and the neighbourhood: these were so offended at his censures and reproofs that they were resolved to accomplish his destruction, by any means which might be attended with safety to themselves. To escape their malice, Jesus retires into another country, under another government. For although he was willing to die, where it might be necessary to promote the purposes of his mission, he was desirous to avoid it, where his death might be accomplished in an irregular manner, by private assassination, or by instigating the populace to stone him.

2. Now the Jews' festival of tabernacles was at hand.

This festival was observed in commemoration of the Jews' dwelling in tents in the wilderness, and was intended to remind them, when settled in a fruitful country, of their former unsettled condition: for this purpose all the males were required to appear at Jerusalem,

Digitized by Google

and to reside in tents about the city during the eight days that the festival lasted. It began on the fifteenth day of the month Tisri, which corresponds with the end of September, or the beginning of the month of October.

3. His brethren therefore said unto him, Depart hence, and go into Judæa, that thy disciples also may see the works that thou doest.

4. For there is no man that doth any thing in secret, and he himself seeketh to be known openly: if thou do these things, show thyself to the world.

These kinsmen of Jesus, supposing him actuated by a desire of fame in assuming the office of a teacher, reproach him with the absurdity of his conduct, having such views, in remaining in an obscure part of the country; and advise him to go up to Jerusalem, the seat of influence and power, that, by performing his miracles there, and gaining proselytes, he might gratify his ruling passion.

5. For neither did his brethren believe in him.

Those who supposed him actuated by a desire of fame could not consider him as under a divine impulse, or as aiming to promote what he professed to have in view, the glory of God. The persons who held this language are called our Lord's brethren: but the word so translated is often applied to persons in a more remote relationship, to cousins; and such was probably the relationship of the persons here referred to. Their unbelief is to be accounted for upon the same principles as that of his fellow-citizens and townsmen in Nazareth.

Digitized by Google

In reply to the advice given him by his relations, Christ intimates that his motive for not going sooner to Jerusalem was the assurance which he had, that he should be in danger of suffering death in that city, or on his way thither, and that it was not proper for him at this time to expose himself to it.

6. Then said Jesus unto them, My time is not yet come, but your time is always ready.

7. The world cannot hate you; but me it hateth, because I testify of it that the works thereof are evil.

That is, it is not proper for me to go up till the feast is begun, because I should hereby expose myself to premature danger: for by the purity of my doctrine and the severity of my reproofs, I have inflamed the minds of the Jews to the highest pitch of resentment. But you may go up to Jerusalem whenever you please: for you have given no such offence, and are exposed to no danger.

8. Go ye up unto this festival: I go not up yet unto this festival, for my time is not yet full come.

By this it appears that he intended to go up, although not immediately.

9. When he had said these words unto them, he abode still in Galilee; *or*, "*having said these words, he continued still in Galilee.*"

10. But when his brethren were gone up, then went he also up to the festival, not openly, but as it were in secret.

Digitized by Google

That is, without teaching publicly or working any miracles, so as to draw a crowd after him. Had he done either, he might have provoked his enemies to put him to death by some irregular means. It was to avoid such a crowd by the way that he staid behind, till his relations and others were gone up.

11. Then the Jews sought him at the festival, and said, Where is he?

They knew that he who had observed other festivals would attend this also, and therefore inquire not whether he would be there, but where he was to be found.

12. And there was much murmuring, "*much disputing*," among the people concerning him; for some said, He is a good man; others said, Nay, but he deceiveth the people.

13. Howbeit no man spake openly of him, for fear of the Jews.

The former opinion would have offended the scribes, and the second the common people, among whom Jesus was highly popular.

REFLECTIONS.

1. In the conduct of Jesus upon this occasion, we see that the greatest courage in facing danger may be united with the greatest prudence in avoiding it, where to encounter it would be useless. He who went up publicly to Jerusalem at the last passover, who visited his usual places of resort, and who put himself into the hands of his enemies, when he knew that every thing was prepared for a public trial and execution, at present retires from Judæa, to avoid his enemies, and absents

Digitized by Google

himself for a time from a religious festival, or goes to it in a private manner, lest he should give too much offence, or yield himself too much to their power. This union of courage with prudence is a rare occurrence, and discovers uncommon excellence of character. We too often see in the advocates of truth nothing but an anxious concern for personal safety; no care but to avoid every appearance and every act which may involve them in hazard; or, on the other hand, a thoughtless rashness, which courts danger and incurs it unnecessarily: hence they become the victims of their own folly, without rendering any essential service to the interests of truth and virtue. Happy is the man who, like Jesus, can unite these seemingly opposite qualities; who knows when to withstand the enemies of truth, and when to retire from them.

2. In the account here given of our Lord's kinsmen, we see the mischievous effects of envy: this prevented them from acknowledging his divine mission, and from perceiving the force of evidence, which was abundantly satisfactory to unprejudiced strangers; and the same evil passion still operates to prevent many from embracing the truth, who enjoy the best advantages for becoming acquainted with it. Let us be careful to keep our breasts free from this pernicious principle. How much better is it to be ranked among the brethren of Christ, by character and disposition than by blood and natural alliance!

3. We see that the best characters are not exempted from the imputation of bad motives. The humble Jesus is charged with vanity and the love of praise; and he who sacrificed every comfort for the good of mankind is accused of a selfish regard to his own interest, and of being a deceiver of the people. Let not those who take upon themselves the office of exposing the corruptions of religion, or of reproving the vices of mankind, be surprized or offended if they experience the like injustice. Such returns are an honourable testimony to their sincerity, and a proof that they walk

Digitized by Google

in the steps of their master; considerations which ought to make them rejoice rather than grieve.

4. We may observe that the enemies of Christ among the Jews are more just in their conclusions than modern unbelievers; for they esteem him a bad man, because he deceived the people; whereas the rejecters of the gospel in the present day maintain that a man may be good, a lover of God and of his brethren, who pretends to speak in God's name, without ever receiving authority from him, and who teaches men to believe and profess doctrines which he knows to be false, and which exposed those who professed them to the loss of every thing that is valuable in the world. That is, they maintain that fraud is consistent with sincerity, and that to usurp the rights of heaven, and to violate its laws, is true piety. To such absurdities are men driven by rejecting the gospel of Christ.

John vii. 14—32.

14. Now about the midst of the feast, "*of the festival*," Jesus went up into the temple and taught.

He avoided going up before, lest, by attracting a crowd, he should provoke his enemies to some private attempt against his life, and the world might hereby be deprived of the benefit arising from a public trial and execution. Of this there was less danger when the festival was so far advanced.

15. And the Jews marvelled, saying, How knoweth this man letters, *rather*, "*learning*," having never learnt; "*having never been taught.*"

The learning of the Jews at this time consisted in the knowledge of the scriptures, and what Christ had been employed in was probably an exposition of some

Digitized by Google

part of the law; his audience were surprised that he should be able to do this, without having had the assistance of a master, which all their scribes and lawyers enjoyed; for Jesus had never been observed to attend upon any. To this he replies by saying that the knowledge which he possessed was not acquired by his own industry, or by the instructions of others, but received from God himself.

16. Jesus answered them, My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me.

17. If any man will do his will, *or*, "*if any man wisheth to do his will*," he shall know of the doctrine, "*he will know of the doctrine*," whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.

That is, the man who is sincerely desirous to do the will of God, and ready to comply with it, wherever discovered, in opposition to his passions and private interests, will easily perceive whether the doctrine which I teach proceed from God, or only from myself. This language of Christ strongly implies that those who supposed his doctrine to be of human origin did so fr[illegible]rejudice, and from a mind averse from comply-[illegible]h the will of God; he now suggests to them a [illegible]rule, by which to try the pretensions of a pro-[illegible] and to which he appeals for the justness of his

18. He that speaketh of himself [illegible]eketh his own glory; but he that [illegible]eketh his glory that sent him, the [illegible]me is true, and no unrighteousness, "*no deceitfulness**," is in him.

The man who assumes the office of a divine teacher, without divine authority, must do so from interested

* See Pearce and Wakefield on this place, and also on Luke xvi. 9.

Digitized by Google

views; such as the desire of fame, or the gratification of some other selfish passion, which he will not fail to manifest in his conduct: but he who appears more concerned about the honour of God than his own reputation, and who can preach to the world doctrines which expose him to contempt and hatred, gives such evidence of disinterestedness as must free him from the suspicion of deceit or imposture, and prove his pretensions to a divine commission to be well founded.

19. Did not Moses give you the law? and yet none of you keepeth the law. Why go ye about to kill me?

This the rulers of the Jews had endeavoured to do ever since he cured the infirm man at the pool of Bethesda, on the sabbath-day. It was on this account that he retired to Galilee, and it was on this account that he was so late in coming to the festival. To profess such veneration for the law of the sabbath, but to violate that which prohibited murder, was just matter of reproach.

20. The people answered and said, Thou hast a dæmon: who goeth about to kill thee?

To have a dæmon signifies the same thing as [illegible] mad: for dæmons, or the spirits of wicked men [illegible] supposed to be the cause of madness; in another passage, John x. 20, they are both joined together: "Thou hast a dæmon, and art mad." This the Jews imputed to him, because he appeared to suspect them of a design against his life. It seems that the common people were not in the secret of the rulers, who had resolved to put him to death.

21. Jesus answered and said unto them, I have done one work and ye all marvel therefore, *or, "at it," for it is here that the phrase rendered "therefore," in the next verse ought to be subjoined.*

Digitized by Google

The work referred to, is that mentioned already, the cure of the lame man at the pool of Bethesda.

22. Moses gave unto you circumcision; (not because it is of Moses but of the fathers, "*of the patriarchs*,") and ye, on the sabbath-day, circumcise a man.

23. If a man on the sabbath day receive circumcision, that the law of Moses should not be broken, are ye angry at me because I have made a man every whit whole? *or*, "*an entire man well on the sabbath-day.*"

The reasoning of Christ seems to be this: if ye, on the sabbath-day, mutilate a man, in order that the law of Moses which injoins circumcision on the eighth day may not be broken, can ye justly be displeased with me for making a man who had lost the use of all his limbs well on that day? So that their own practice would justify what he had done. The law of circumcision was delivered to Abraham, long before the delivery of the law by Moses; however, Moses had made some regulations respecting it.

24. Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment.

In appearance I have violated the law which enjoins the observation of the sabbath; but if you consider the object I had in view, in working on that day, that it was to heal a man who was ill, you will perceive that the law has not been broken. Judge, therefore, equitably and impartially in the case.

25. Then said some of them of Jerusalem, Is not this he whom they seek to kill?

Digitized by Google

26. But lo he speaketh boldly, and they say nothing.

The inhabitants of Jerusalem were acquainted with the design that was formed in that city for taking away the life of Christ, but it was not known to the inhabitants of the country.

Do the rulers know indeed that this is the very Christ? *rather*, "*know certainly that this is the Christ* ?*"

Are the rulers, who were once so intent upon putting Jesus to death as an impostor, now really convinced that he is the Messiah, and do they on that account suffer him to proceed thus without molestation?

27. Howbeit, we know this man whence he is; but when Christ cometh no man knoweth whence he is.

An illustrious prophecy concerning the Messiah, Is. liii. contains the following expression, according to our translation. "And who shall declare his generation;" which the Jews probably understood as referring to the difficulty of tracing his origin, and which in modern times has been referred to his supposed miraculous birth, or his being without a father. But Bishop Lowth thus translates the passage, "And his manner of life who would declare?" And another able critic, "And the men of his generation who will be able to describe?" In either case there is no reference to the birth or origin of Christ; but the Jews might possibly mistake the sense of the passage, as we have done. Jesus, knowing what these inhabitants of Jerusalem said of him, delivered the words that follow in a loud voice, in order that they might hear distinctly what he said; and as these Jews expressed a disbelief of his being the Messiah, because they knew whence he was, he takes occasion thence to tell them whence or from whom he came.

* The word which we render *very* is not found in many manuscripts.

Digitized by Google

28. Then cried Jesus, in the temple, as he taught, saying, Ye both know me and whence I am, and I am not come of myself, but he that sent me is true, whom ye know not.

You imagine I cannot be the Messiah foretold in the prophets, because you know my birth and origin. Yet that I have a divine commission to teach, and do not set up a claim to it of myself, is evident from the testimony of the Divine Being, who accompanies my preaching with miracles, whose testimony is every way worthy of credit, since he could not suffer you to be imposed upon; but with the counsels of this Being you are not so well acquainted as you imagine.

29. But I know him; for I am from him, and he hath sent me.

I am acquainted with his counsels, and particularly with his designs respecting the Messiah: for I have had intercourse with him, and it is he who sent me out to preach.

30. Then they sought to take him; but no man laid hands on him, because his hour was not yet come.

They were provoked to hear Jesus say that he was better acquainted with the divine counsels than themselves, and discovered an earnest desire to apprehend him, but were prevented from executing their purpose by Divine Providence, in order that Jesus might be reserved for a public trial.

31. And many of the people, "*many of the multitude*," believed on him, and said, When Christ cometh will he do more miracles than these, which this man hath done?

Digitized by Google

REFLECTIONS.

1. We may observe how justly Christ appeals to the disinterestedness of his own conduct, as a proof of his acting by a divine commission: "he that speaketh of himself seeketh his own glory." The object of impostors is invariably something of a selfish nature; the advancement of their temporal interest, the acquisition of fame or of power, or, in one way or other, the aggrandizement of self. Whoever will take the trouble of examining their conduct, will always find it to proceed from some or other of these motives. But nothing in the conduct of Christ can give ground to suspect that he was actuated by the same views. He sought not wealth, or fame, or power, or any of those objects which engage the pursuit of worldly minded and selfish men. But, on the contrary, when he forsook his occupation in life, and chose another, which would not provide for him a dwelling, and obliged him to subsist upon the occasional benevolence of his followers; when he assumed a character totally opposite to that expected by the Jews in their Messiah; when he voluntarily offended and drove away not only the scribes and Pharisees, men of power and reputation, who could communicate both reputation and power to others, but even the common people, as soon as they appeared to be actuated by improper views, he appeared to be totally indifferent to, and to despise, such objects of pursuit. The great object of his life appears to have been the glory of God, by fulfilling the purposes of his mission; to reform the abuses which had taken place in religion, by which the honour of God was lessened, and to teach men a pure system of piety and morality. To this grand end he applied himself, with indefatigable industry, while he lived, and to this he at length sacrificed his life. The fidelity of such a teacher there appears no reason to question.

Digitized by Google

2. What Christ says of those who in his own time were most likely to be successful inquirers after the divine origin of Christianity, is equally just in the present times. Those who are inclined to do the will of God in general, will easily discover whether it come from heaven: for it is accompanied with such a mass of evidence, as can hardly fail to satisfy a virtuous mind, not rendered averse from the truth by practising vices which it condemns and threatens to punish. This has always been a principal obstacle to the reception of the gospel, and has made more unbelievers than any other cause. Christianity is still what it was in the beginning, a test of men's characters; by the vicious it is rejected, but by the virtuous and good cordially embraced; I mean not, however, to say that cases may not occur in which the friends of virtue and piety are placed in such difficult and trying circumstances, as not to be able to discern the truth. And in such cases, no doubt, a merciful judge will make allowance for their unavoidable infirmities.

3. Let those who call themselves the disciples of Jesus remember the high authority under which he acts. The doctrine which he teaches is not of human origin: it came not from man but from God. To the decisions of Christ, then, in matters of religion, let them implicitly submit, as to the decrees of Heaven; and if men should at any time require them to believe doctrines, or practice rites, which Christ hath not enjoined, let them be rejected without hesitation: for they are not supported by proper authority. To comply with such would be high treason against the government of Heaven.

4. The advice which Christ gives to his adversaries, for their direction in forming their judgment of his actions, "Judge not according to appearance," ought to be carefully remembered by his followers. When they see actions performed which are new and singular, contrary to established usage, and to the practice of those who are esteemed wise and learned, and which apparently proceed from improper motives, and have

Digitized by Google

an evil tendency, let them not be hasty in concluding that they are really criminal. Upon a more careful examination of the subject, upon weighing all the circumstances of the action; the motives from which it proceeds, as well as the external appearance, they may find it not to be so reprehensible as at the first view it appeared. Nay, upon further reflection, they may see reason to admire and praise what they were once inclined to condemn. Let the errors into which they have fallen in judging others already, teach them caution on every future occasion.

John vii. 32. to the end.

32. The Pharisees heard that the people murmured such things concerning him, *they heard these private debatings of the multitude*; and the Pharisees and the chief priests sent officers to take him.

Leading men of these two classes of people prevailed upon the Sanhedrim to pass a resolution for apprehending Jesus, and for authorizing them to execute it. They were both alarmed to find that the common people began to suppose him to be the Messiah, well knowing that their own character must sink, in proportion as that of Jesus rose in estimation. They resolved, therefore, to secure their power and influence by taking away his life. Jesus, knowing the resolution they had taken, was aware that he had not long to live, and therefore throws out obscure hints respecting his speedy departure from the world, and his exaltation after death; which his adversaries did not understand.

33. Then said Jesus unto them, Yet a little while am I with you, " ***but***

Digitized by Google

a little while longer shall I be with you," and then I go unto him that sent me.

34. Ye shall seek me, and shall not find me; and where I am thither ye cannot come.

When I have left the world and am ascended on high, you will earnestly look for the Messiah, when overtaken with the troubles which are coming upon you; but I shall be removed to a place whither you cannot come to me. These last words were intended to reproach them for their folly, in resolving to put to death one whom they would so soon wish to have among them. This reference to his speedy removal to heaven the Jews did not understand.

35. Then said the Jews among themselves, Whither will he go, that we shall not find him? Will he go unto the dispersed among the Gentiles, and teach the Gentiles?

The dispersed among the Gentiles, or Greeks, were Jews who lived in heathen countries for the sake of trade or commerce, or other purposes, but followed the institutions of Moses. That after having instructed the inhabitants of Judæa, Christ should go abroad into foreign countries to instruct his dispersed countrymen, was a thing in itself not highly improbable. Accordingly the Jews put this construction upon his language, when he spoke of going whither they could not follow him; but it could never enter into their thoughts, that a Jew would travel into foreign countries for the sake of communicating instruction to Gentiles, persons whom they considered as cast out of the favour of the Divine Being, and as unworthy of divine revelation. Bishop Pearce, therefore, with much reason, concludes that the words in the original manuscript of this gospel were not as we have them now, *to teach the Gentiles*, but, *to teach them*, that is,

Digitized by Google

the dispersed abroad among the Gentiles just mentioned, and that the text has been by some means altered.

36. What manner of saying is this, that he said, Ye shall seek me, and shall not find me, and, Where I am, thither ye cannot come?

Although the above construction of his words appeared the most probable, they were not perfectly satisfied with it.

37. In the last, that great day of the festival, Jesus stood, and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink.

It does not appear from the law which enjoined the observance of this festival, which you have Num. xxix. that the eighth day of the feast, which was the last, was intended to be more solemn or sacred than the rest; but it seems the Jews esteemed it so. One of the ceremonies which, we are told, they performed on this day, was that of taking water from the brook of Siloam, and pouring it out, with great form, in the temple, in commemoration of their ancestors having been supported by a stream of water from a rock in the wilderness; and accompanied with prayers for a supply of rain at the approaching seed-time. Upon this custom Christ's metaphorical language in this and the next verse is supposed to be founded; it being usual with him to suggest instructions to his followers from events, as they occurred. In saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink, his meaning seems to be, if any man wish for happiness, let him believe in me, and I will supply him with what he wants: but the benefit shall not be confined to himself; for he adds,

38. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, *rather*, "*as the*

Digitized by Google

scripture hath commanded," out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.

The allusion seems to be to a cistern, which, when full, overflows: in this manner the person who believed in Christ would be filled; that is, would not only receive the Holy Spirit himself, but communicate it freely to others. The passage of scripture referred to is supposed to be Deut. xviii. 15, "The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken."

39. But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost, "*the Holy Spirit*," was not yet given, because that Jesus was not yet glorified.

These are the words of the evangelist, explaining the language of Christ, where it would otherwise be unintelligible to the reader; as he has done in several other instances. He informs us that it referred to the miraculous powers afterwards bestowed upon the apostles and first Christians, when Christ had ascended up on high. These powers he calls the Holy Spirit, and not, as we have improperly translated it, *Holy Ghost*, because they proceeded from the spirit of God, that is, from God himself, who is holy. This passage, as well as many others, affords us a proof that by *Holy Spirit*, when it occurs in the New Testament, was intended, not a distinct being, but certain divine qualities and powers. For the passage, if literally translated, would be thus; "for the Holy Spirit was not yet:" which could not be true of a Being supposed to exist from eternity, but is very proper language when applied to powers which had not yet been manifested. It was in this sense that the Ephesians spoke, when asked by Paul whether they had received the Holy Spirit, Acts xix. 2, "We have not so much as heard whether there be a Holy Spirit." Such powers had been communi-

Digitized by Google

cated in an ample manner to the prophets and other persons, under the Old Testament, but they had ceased for many years before the appearance of Christ, and were not generally given till after his ascension.

40. Many of the people, therefore, when they heard this saying, "*this discourse,*" said, Of a truth this is the prophet, *referring probably to the Messiah.*

This conclusion they drew not from the last words which Christ delivered, but from the whole of his discourse on the present occasion, which had in it something so convincing as to overcome the prejudices not only of the common people, but also of the officers who came to apprehend him. Others expressed themselves still more unambiguously: for it is added,

41. Others said, This is the Christ. But some said, Shall Christ come out of Galilee?

42. Hath not the scripture said that Christ cometh of the seed of David, and out of the town of Bethlehem where David was?

Jesus was supposed to be born at Nazareth, a city of Galilee; whereas the Jews understood that their Messiah was to be born at Bethlehem in Judæa. On this account some found a difficulty in admitting Jesus to be entitled to that character. A prophecy of Micah undoubtedly speaks of some ruler of Israel, who was to come out of Bethlehem: but had the apostles applied that prophecy to Christ, and understood that being born there was necessary to the character of the Messiah, they would have called him Jesus of Bethlehem, and not Jesus of Nazareth, as he is uniformly denominated. It appears also that the friends of Jesus were at this time ignorant of his being born at Beth-

Digitized by Google

lehem, otherwise they would have been able easily to remove this objection, by mentioning that circumstance.

43. So there was a division among the people because of him.

The people were divided in their opinion respecting him.

44. And some of them would have taken him; but no man laid hands on him.

45. Then came the officers to the chief priests and Pharisees, and they said unto them, Why have ye not brought him?

The persons who proposed this question were probably the Jewish Sanhedrim, assembled to receive and try their prisoner.

46. The officers answered, Never man spake like this man.

47. Then answered them the Pharisees, Are ye also deceived?

48. Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed on him?

If not one of your magistrates and religious instructors has yet believed in him, is it not presumption in you to do so? By *rulers* we are here to understand the members of the Sanhedrim, agreeably to which we find that Nicodemus, who was one of the number, is called a ruler of the Jews, John iii. 1.

49. But this people, "*this multitude*," which knoweth not the law are cursed.

Digitized by Google

50. Nicodemus saith unto them, (he that came to Jesus by night) being one of them,

51. Doth our law judge any man, "*condemn any man*," before it hear him, and know what he doth?

This might be the law of the Sanhedrim, as a court of justice, but founded, no doubt, upon the equitable principles of the law of Moses.

52. They answered and said unto him, Art thou also of Galilee? Search and look, for out of Galilee ariseth no prophet, *rather*, "*the prophet is not to arise out of Galilee.*"

These members of the Sanhedrim, and teachers of the people, could not be so ignorant as not to know that Galilee had been the birth place of many prophets.

53. And every man went unto his own house.

REFLECTIONS.

1. Let all men joyfully accept the invitation given by Christ to them that thirst, to come unto him and drink. Are you desirous of happiness, and dissatisfied with present enjoyments, from whatever sources they arise, whether the gratifications of sense, agreeable society, wealth or honour or power, or from all these united? Do you long for something more substantial than what these objects can afford? Come to Christ, and he will satisfy your desires. Is your mind dejected with disappointment, and overwhelmed with trouble? Come to him, and he will give you relief.

Digitized by Google

His precepts will calm your minds; his gospel will kindle such joyful hopes in your breast, as will prevent you from feeling the weight of any earthly burthen. Are you ambitious of excellence? Do you wish to raise your minds to a far greater degree of perfection in moral virtue than they have yet attained? He will furnish you with the means of doing so. Place yourselves under his direction: follow the rules which he has prescribed; and you will enter upon a career of improvement which will never end, which will place you in a rank with the highest angels, in the course of an eternal duration, and even carry you beyond their present condition!

2. Those who reject these invitations will, like these Jews, see reason to repent of their folly. Although, in the season of health and ease, they may make light of the offers of the Saviour, and think that the world furnishes them with many things which are more desirable; yet, when the time of sickness comes, and especially the hour of death, they will be of a different opinion. At that season they will see the worth of virtuous dispositions of mind, which are necessary to qualify men for the enjoyment of future happiness, but which can be learnt from Christ alone. They will then be sensible of the value of a well grounded hope of a glorious immortality, which an uniform obedience to the laws of Christ can alone inspire. They will then earnestly enquire for the means of attaining both: but the wisdom they have just acquired comes too late to be of any use. They may wish and long and seek for Christ, but he is not to be found. The period for securing an interest in him is past, and nothing now remains, for those who have suffered it to escape, but bitter and unavailing lamentations over their own folly. Think of this, ye that now make light of the Saviour, and listen in time to his invitations and instructions, lest ye should be guilty of an error which it will hereafter be impossible to repair!

3. To condemn no man before he is heard, is an excellent rule, not only for courts of justice, but for

Digitized by Google

private persons. To examine a subject before we decide upon it, is no more than common prudence, which every one must learn who has the smallest experience of the weakness of his own faculties, and of the numerous causes which contribute to conceal or misrepresent the truth. For want of attending to this rule, how often do we see the best characters vilified, and the most important truths rejected, to which a little examination and enquiry would have ensured a very different treatment. Let the great mischiefs which have arisen from the neglect of this rule, as well as the reasonableness of the rule itself, obtain for it our sacred regard.

4. The question proposed to the officers, who, instead of apprehending Christ, as they were directed, were inclined to become his disciples, Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed on him, may teach us the folly of submitting our faith to the opinions of other men. The absurdity of such a conduct in the present instance is obvious to every one at first view: for no one will say that the Jews ought not to believe in Christ, because their rulers had not done so. Yet no better argument than this can be pleaded for withholding assent to many important articles of faith. "Have any of the rulers of the kingdom, or of the teachers of religion, believed this or the other doctrine? Has it been adopted by the majority?" is as confidently urged, as if the fallacy and absurdity of such reasoning had never been exposed. At certain periods of the Christian as well as of the Jewish church, the opinions of rulers and the opinions of the multitude afford presumptions of errors rather than of truth. Let us remember, my brethren, that as every one is to be answerable to God for his own faith, so it becomes him to receive or reject doctrines upon the conviction of his own mind, and not upon the opinions of others,

Digitized by Google

John viii. 1—20.

1. Jesus went unto the mount of Olives.

Thither he went to spend the night, that his presence at Jerusalem might not excite tumults, and furnish his enemies with a plausible pretext for apprehending him before the proper time.

2. And early in the morning he came again into the temple, and all the people came unto him; and he sat down, and taught them.

He intimated by the early time of his appearance, and the posture which he assumed, that he intended to deliver to them a discourse of some length.

3. And the scribes and Pharisees, *the Pharisaic scribes*, brought unto him a woman taken in adultery; and when they had set her in the midst,

4. They say unto him, Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act.

5. Now Moses in the law commanded us that such should be stoned; but what sayest thou?

6. This they said tempting him, "*trying him*," that they might have to accuse him.

The snare laid for Jesus on this occasion consisted in tempting him, with a show of respect, as if they

Digitized by Google

regarded his authority as greater than that of Moses, to pass sentence upon this criminal; which would have afforded them an opportunity of accusing him before the Sanhedrim or the Romans, or both, as assuming to himself the office of a magistrate, and usurping their rights. It was for a woman betrothed to a husband, and guilty of this crime, that the law of Moses appointed the punishment of stoning. Upon a married woman guilty of adultery it only pronounced the punishment of death, without specifying what kind of death it should be. Deut. xxii. 20, &c. Yet as the crime in the latter instance was more heinous than in the former, it was natural to conclude that the punishment should not be less severe. And it seems, from a passage in the prophet Ezekiel, as if this law had always been interpreted in this manner, Ezekiel xvi. 38, 40. "And I will judge thee as women that brake wedlock, and they shall stone thee with stones."

The design of the Jews in this transaction is generally supposed to be what has been just mentioned: as the Roman law, however, did not punish this crime so severely as the Jewish, some have conjectured that their object was to render Jesus obnoxious to the Roman governor, by inducing him to sanction a law which that governor had interfered to suspend*. But whatever their designs were, they were completely disappointed by the wisdom and prudence of Jesus. At first he appeared not to hear, or not to attend to, what these accusers of the woman said to him.

But Jesus stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground, [as though he heard them not.]

The last words of this sentence are not to be found in the best editions of the New Testament†, and probably at first were no more than the explanation of some transcriber, which was afterwards inadvertently adopted into the text. What Christ intended by this

* Lardner's Works, Vol. i. pp. 41, 42.

† See Wetstein in loc.

Digitized by Google

action of writing upon the ground, it is not easy to say; except it were merely to afford himself time to consider what answer he should make to the ensnaring question proposed to him.

7. So, when they continued asking him, he lift up himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her.

The law of Moses, which appointed the punishment of stoning for capital offences, directed that the first stones should be thrown at the offender by the witnesses against him, Deut. xvii. 7. Christ here directs that those of this criminal's accusers, or of the witnesses against her, should throw the first stone, who had never committed the same or a similar offence; well knowing beforehand, by that supernatural knowledge with which he was endued, that they had been all guilty of this or some other heinous crime, and that a sense of guilt and fear of shame would not allow them to stand forward, as persons of irreproachable character. To afford them time for reflection, and to wait the issue of what he had said, he again employed himself as before.

8. And again he stooped down, and wrote on the ground.

9. And they that heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out, one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last; and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst.

It is not necessary to suppose that these men went out, in exact order, according to their age; but, the elder persons beginning to go out first, their example was followed by the younger, until they had all disappeared. Nor is it necessary to suppose that Jesus and

Digitized by Google

the woman were the only persons left: for there were other spectators, whom he had before been teaching, and whom he began to teach again immediately afterwards.

10. When Jesus had lift up, "*lifted up*," himself, and saw none but the woman, *i. e. none in the place where she and her accusers had stood*, he said unto her, Woman, where are those thine accusers? Hath no man condemned thee?

Hath no civil magistrate passed sentence upon thee; neither the Sanhedrim, nor the Roman governor; or to whomsoever the right of exercising this authority belongs?

11. She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee.

I do not pass sentence upon thee: for it is an office that does not belong to me, and has been offered to me on the present occasion only to draw me into a snare. But although I dismiss thee because I have no authority to detain thee, I am sensible thou hast been guilty of a great crime, and warn thee not to commit it any more.

Go, and sin no more.

Before I dismiss this story, it is right to inform you that it is not to be found in some of the oldest and best manuscripts of this evangelist, and that when inserted in others, it is frequently distinguished from the rest of the text by a mark prefixed, or by being put at the end of the book, or in one of the other evangelists, and that on account of this, as well as of some supposed improprieties in the narration, it has been concluded by several learned men not to be genuine. I see no sufficient reason, however, for doubting its authen-

Digitized by Google

ticity: for although not found in all the old manuscripts, it appears in many of great authority. The mark affixed to the story in some copies, was, no doubt, intended to remind the reader that it was to be passed over, and not read in public, like other parts of scripture; which originated in a foolish apprehension that prevailed in very early times, that our Lord's behaviour to this woman did not sufficiently discountenance adultery. This practice of leaving out the passage in public reading may be regarded as the cause of its being omitted in transcribing, and will explain to us the present inconsistency between the different copies. In respect to our Lord's conduct, the caution with which he acted is easily accounted for and justified, by recollecting that he was called to decide on a matter in which his enemies had laid a snare for him.

12. Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world.

I communicate the light of knowledge, not to the Jews only, but to all mankind, as the sun diffuses his beams over all nations.

He that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.

The light which I shall give to my followers will not leave them uncertain which way they are going, like men who are left in the dark, but will show them the way to eternal life. Here our Lord resumes the discourse of which we have an account in the preceding chapter, and which had only been interrupted by the night, and the case of the adulterous woman. What suggested to him the figure of light upon this occasion, might be nothing more than the return of the morning, or the bright shining of the sun where he stood.

13. The Pharisees therefore said unto him, Thou bearest record, " *thou*

Digitized by Google

bearest witness," of thyself, thy witness is not true.

We cannot depend upon what thou sayest: for it is said in praise of thyself, in doing which men are apt to transgress the bounds of truth.

14. Jesus answered and said unto them, Though I bear witness of myself, yet my testimony is true: for I know whence I came and whither I go, *rather,* "*that I know whence I came and whither I go**."

Jesus here explains the substance of that testimony which he had just been bearing respecting himself, and which he affirms to be true, that he knew whence he came, or that he had a commission from God, and whither he was going, or that he was about to die, and to ascend up on high.

But ye cannot tell whence I come and whither I go.

You do not see that I am come from God, and that I am to rise to immortality; you will not therefore acknowledge the truth of what I assert.

15. Ye judge after the flesh: I judge no man.

You judge according to appearances, and therefore conclude that I cannot be the Messiah, because I do not appear in outward splendour. I pass sentence of condemnation upon no man at present, my object being to save men, and not to condemn them.

16. And yet if I judge, my judgement is true. For I am not alone, but I and the Father who sent me.

He tells the Pharisees that if he had condemned men, yet his decision must be just, since he would be

* See Wakefield upon the passage.

Digitized by Google

assisted by the wisdom of his Father, who had sent him. For the truth of evidence when supported by the testimony of two witnesses, he appeals to the maxims of their law, which allows of the testimony of two witnesses in the most important cases, those in which life is concerned.

17. It is also written in your law, that the testimony of two men is true.

18. I am one that bear witness of myself, and the Father that sent me beareth witness of me.

The testimony which the Father had given in favour of Jesus, was the miracles which he performed; works which no one but God could do, and which he would never perform in favour of an impostor.

19. Then said they unto him, Where is thy Father? Jesus answered, Ye neither know me nor my Father. If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also.

If you had had just notions of me, as a divine teacher, you would have entertained just notions of that Being whom I speak of as my father; for I should not have failed to give them you. But, being ignorant of the true character of one, you are of course unacquainted with the character of the other.

20. These words spake Jesus in the treasury, as he taught in the temple; and no man laid hands on him: for his hour was not yet come.

The circumstance of Christ's speaking thus in the treasury is mentioned, to show his courage and intrepidity; and his not being apprehended in consequence of them, is attributed to the providence of God, which would not yet suffer him to be seized.

Digitized by Google

REFLECTIONS.

1. The Jewish law, which punished the adulterer with death, seems to have been a wiser institution to prevent the commission of that crime than the provisions of other states, which impose only a light fine. How inefficacious these punishments are for the purpose for which they are employed, is but too evident from the great increase of this crime, and the growing frequency with which it is committed. If the heinousness of an offence, and the many opportunities which occur for committing it, ought to regulate the measure of punishment, there is none which requires greater severity; for there is none to which the temptations are more numerous, which occasions more private distress, or, when frequent, so much depraves the manners of a people.

To remedy the defects of human laws, and to prevent as far as we are able the spread of the evil, let men impress upon their own minds, and labour to impress upon that of others, a strong abhorrence of this odious crime. Let them strictly guard against every thought and action which may lead to it; remembering what our Saviour has said upon this subject, upon another occasion; that the guilt of adultery may be incurred, where the crime has not been committed; and that he is chargeable with it, who does not repress improper desires, or who only tempts others to the sin.

2. The story which we have been reading illustrates the power of conscience over very bad men: the Pharisees had presented this woman to Jesus, and requested his opinion, in order to insnare him; that they might be furnished with an opportunity of taking away his life. This discovered deliberate malice, and much depravity of heart; yet it seems that conscience had

Digitized by Google

not entirely lost its power: when Christ appeals to this principle in their breasts, it makes each of them confess his guilt, and expose himself to shame in the presence of the multitude. Let us take care how we violate the dictates of conscience; it will often condemn where there is none to accuse, and even when others applaud. It can make men wretched in the moment of success, and when surrounded with the greatest outward prosperity. If, on the contrary, we always listen to its voice, its approbation will support the mind under the censures of the world, and afford us inward peace in the midst of outward trouble.

3. Let us rely on the evidence which we have for the divine mission of Jesus: it is supported by credible and unexceptionable testimony; by the declarations of Christ, who gave the strongest proofs of integrity which it was possible for man to give; both teaching the truth with the utmost boldness in the midst of malignant enemies, and sealing it with his blood; and by the voice of God himself, who cannot lie, nor impose upon his creatures, by giving to a false prophet a power to work miracles, and hereby to display the credentials of heaven. These are the witnesses whom we have for the truth of the gospel, and blessed be God it is such testimony as ought to satisfy every rational being. Upon much slighter evidence we take the most important measures, and risk our most valuable interests in the common concerns of life; it is wise and right, therefore, to do so here, where our spiritual interests are concerned.

4. Let us gratefully accept that light which Christ gives in the gospel: it is the light of life; it discovers to us an existence beyond the grave, and shows us the way by which we may arrive at it. This light is so much more valuable than that of the sun, as the latter only guides our steps during a short and transitory existence, liable to pain and trouble; the former leads us to a life that will never end, which will be free from trouble, and the happiness of which will be continually increasing. It is so much more valuable than the

Digitized by Google

light of nature, as that shines more dimly, and opens to us no certain prospect beyond the grave. Let us, my brethren, be careful to improve the light of day, by walking in the path marked out for us by the heavenly luminary.

John viii. 21—41.

21. Then said Jesus again unto them, I go my way, and ye shall seek me, and shall die in your sins. Whither I go ye cannot come.

As the Jews refused to believe in the divine mission of Jesus, and made light of his pretensions, he warns them of the evil consequences of their conduct, telling them that the time would come, when they would be sensible of the value of the Messiah, and seeking him with the utmost diligence; that is, when the Roman armies began to ravage their country; but that they would not then be able to find him, since he should go to a place where they could not come to him, and would leave them to perish by those calamities which they would bring upon themselves by rejecting him. This reference to his own ascension the Jews did not understand; but as they imagined, when Jesus used the same language before, chap. vii. 34, 35, that he spoke of going among the Jews dispersed over the Gentile nations, so now they supposed that he referred to putting himself to death.

22. Then said the Jews, Will he kill himself? Because he saith, Whither I go ye cannot come.

Jesus, without making any reply to this absurd construction of his language, goes on to mention the causes of their rejecting him, and their consequent destruction.

Digitized by Google

23. And he said unto them, Ye are from beneath, "*from below*;" I am from above; ye are of this world; I am not of this world.

The reason why ye refuse to receive me as the Messiah is, that you are men of worldly views, and no Messiah will please you, but one who appears with external pomp and splendour, suitable to those views: whereas the kingdom which I introduce is of a spiritual nature. When Christ says of himself in this passage, that he is from above, he does not refer to any local descent, but to his being of a spiritual and heavenly character, in opposition to that of the Jews, which was earthly and sensual.

24. I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins; for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins.

Being of this worldly character, I have foretold that the majority of your nation will perish; for such must be your punishment, by the determination of heaven, if you do not believe me to be the divine messenger whom I have represented myself to be from the beginning of this discourse.

25. Then said they unto him, Who art thou? and Jesus saith unto them, Even the same that I said unto you from the beginning.

That is, from the beginning of this discourse, where he had called himself the light of the world; intending thereby that he was the true Messiah: but he carefully avoided saying this in express words, both on this and other occasions.

26. I have many things to say, and to judge of you; but he that sent me

Digitized by Google

is true; and I speak to the world those things which I have heard of him.

I have many things to say to you, and many charges to bring against you, in the character which I bear; but I content myself at present with saying that I bring a message from a Being who is every way worthy of credit, and that I say nothing in his name but what he directed me to deliver.

27. They understood not that he spake to them of the Father.

Although Christ had made the plainest allusion to his being sent of God, they did not understand to whom he referred.

28. Then said Jesus unto them, When ye have lift up the son of man, then shall ye know that I am he, and that I do nothing of myself, but as my Father hath taught me I speak these things.

After my death upon the cross and resurrection from the dead, many of you will be convinced that I am the Messiah, and that I teach nothing in God's name but what I have received from him. Agreeably to this prediction, we find that many thousands of Jews believed in the divine mission of Jesus, when the apostles announced his resurrection from the dead.

29. And he that sent me is with me. The Father hath not left me alone: for I do always those things that please him.

He has not left me to prove my divine commission by my own declarations solely, but acts by me in working miracles. This favour I enjoy, because I am wholly devoted to his will.

Digitized by Google

Jesus having, in the last verse but one, spoken of his being about to be lifted up, some of his hearers imagined that he spake of some outward splendour that he was about to assume, and concluded thence that he might be the Messiah, inasmuch as he would then correspond with the notions which they had formed of him.

30. As he spake these words, "*these things*," many believed on him.

31. Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, *if ye persevere in believing and practising my doctrine*, then are ye my disciples indeed.

32. And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

You shall become acquainted with the whole scheme of the gospel, which, by way of eminence, is called the truth; and the belief and practice of it shall exalt you to a state of dignity and freedom which is unknown to others. It has been conjectured by Sir Isaac Newton, that the jubilee of the Jews fell on this year, and that the time for setting Jewish slaves at liberty was about the time of this feast of tabernacles. If this opinion be well founded, it will show why our Lord mentioned freedom, as the effect of truth, rather than any other, and serve to throw light upon other parts of this discourse. When Jesus declared that the truth would make his disciples free, it implied that they were servants or slaves before. This insinuation offended these new converts.

33. They answered him, We be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man. How sayest thou, Ye shall be made free?

Digitized by Google

If this be said of the whole nation, it was not true; for they had been in bondage in Egypt and in Babylon, and were at this time subject to the Romans. It is more probable, therefore, that these men spoke of themselves personally, that they were never in bondage. Jesus informs them that the bondage of which he spoke was of a spiritual, and not of a civil, nature, and that it arose from the subjection of the mind to evil passions and vices.

34. Jesus answered them, Verily, verily I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin, "*the slave of sin.*"

In this sense you are certainly slaves; for you have been under the dominion of your appetites and passions.

35. And the servant abideth not in the house for ever; but the son abideth ever.

The slave is not sure that he shall always remain in the family of his master; for he may be disposed of to another person; as slaves, therefore, you are liable to be put out of the family of God; but the son has always the privilege of remaining in the house, and, when he succeeds his father, has the power of giving freedom to whomsoever he pleases. If I, therefore, who sustain the character of the Son of God, give you freedom, you will enjoy it in perfection.

36. If the Son, therefore, shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.

37. I know that ye are Abraham's seed; but ye seek to kill me, because my word hath no place in you.

I know that you are the descendents of that excellent person, Abraham; but what will that avail you,

Digitized by Google

when you have formed the design of putting me to death, because you dislike my doctrine?

38. I speak that which I have seen with my Father, and ye do that which ye have seen with your Father.

We both indeed follow the directions of our respective instructors; you of your's, and I of mine; but they are quite opposite to each other. From these declarations the Jews suspected that he meant to insinuate that they were not the children of Abraham, and therefore again assert their descent from him.

39. They answered and said unto him, Abraham is our father. Jesus saith unto them, If ye were Abraham's children, *if ye resembled him in disposition, as children are supposed to resemble their parents*, ye would do the works of Abraham.

40. But now ye seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth which I have heard of God: this did not Abraham.

Abraham never did any thing like this, but gave a ready reception to all the messages which he received from God, and carefully complied with them.

41. Ye do the deeds of your father. Then said they to him, We be not born of fornication; we have one father, even God.

The Jews at length understand Christ to speak not of natural descent, but of a moral and religious one; and in this sense claim a right to be considered as the descendents of Abraham, since they were not born of

Digitized by Google

Gentile parents, and therefore the fruits of fornication; (for a connection with idolaters is represented in the Jewish scriptures as a breach of the marriage-covenant;) but the natural descendents of Abraham, and the children of God.

REFLECTIONS.

1. The Jewish people, of whose temper this passage affords us a specimen, exhibit a melancholy example of the unhappy effect of worldly views, in blinding the understanding, and in preventing it from receiving the plainest truth, even when the reception of it is necessary to salvation. Nothing could be clearer than the justness of Christ's claims to a divine commission; for they were supported by the most abundant evidence; by the repeated declarations of Jesus himself, confirmed and established with the testimony of God, who bore witness to their truth by a great variety of beneficent miracles:—in short, by stronger and more satisfactory proofs than those of any other prophet, not excepting Moses: yet all this evidence made no impression upon the majority of the Jewish nation, because Jesus was a teacher of pure morals and unaffected piety, and presented them with nothing which was calculated to gratify their pride, their vanity, or their ambition. No evidence could convince them that a person of this character could be their Messiah. Instructed by their example, let us be careful that we suffer not our minds to be corrupted by the same evil passions; particularly by that inordinate love of the world, which would lead us to suppose that there is nothing valuable but wealth and splendour: no opinion can be more unfavourable to the reception of the truth, or make us more unwilling to suffer in its defence. Let it be our maxim that truth and wisdom are the most valuable treasure; these will not always give us riches, but they will give us what is more valuable—peace of mind and security from danger.

Digitized by Google

2. Let us value the gospel of Christ, here called the truth, as the source of the most important practical effects. It is not an idle theory or speculation, but an active and powerful principle, producing the happiest influence upon the conduct; freeing the mind from the slavery of vice, from the bondage of fear, and inspiring it with the noblest views and most animating hopes. Such is the genuine effect of the gospel of truth; exalting man to the true dignity and happiness of his nature. Let us seach for it in its purity with diligence, and endeavour to free it from that mass of corruption with which it has been loaded; and when found, let us present it to the mind continually.

3. We learn from the character of these Jews, of what little value it is to be descended from worthy ancestors, while we do not imitate their conduct. They valued themselves for being descended from Abraham, the father of the faithful, and the friend of God: they treated with contempt all those who could not boast of so illustrious an origin: but their character was in every respect the reverse of his, neither believing the declarations of God, obeying his voice, nor seeking his favour; and they were therefore abandoned by him to those evils which they had merited by their sins. If the virtues of Abraham could not benefit his posterity, nor save them from ruin, much less can we expect these effects from ancestry of inferior character. Some advantages indeed they afford us, by furnishing incitements to imitate worthy deeds: but these motives to goodness it is possible to resist, and then they only serve to aggravate the guilt of those who could not be restrained from wickedness by such advantages, and to render the degeneracy of their character so much the more conspicuous. Let us remember that there is no just claim to excellence, but what is founded upon personal virtue, and that there is nothing else which can recommend us to the divine favour.

Digitized by Google

John viii. 42. to the end.

42. Jesus said unto them, If God were your Father, ye would love me, for I proceeded forth and came from God, neither came I of myself, but he sent me.

Jesus had told the Jews who attended him in the temple, and had a design to apprehend him and put him to death, that they did the works of their father, meaning the devil. To this they had replied, that God was their father, and that they were entitled to the name and character of his children. Jesus answers, that if they had possessed the temper of the children of God, they would have respected him, who was his messenger, and accompanied with such evidence of his mission as the children of God must have submitted to. This passage plainly shows, that the phrases *coming from God, coming down from heaven, coming or being sent into the world*, and others of a like kind, do not signify any local descent, but coming with a divine commission: for what Jesus sets in opposition to these phrases is coming of himself, or without any divine authority.

43. Why do ye not understand my speech? Even because ye cannot hear my word.

The reason why you do not understand and believe what I have said concerning my divine mission, is obvious: your minds are so prejudiced, that you will not attend with due care to what I say. Christ now tells the Jews plainly what he meant by saying, verse forty-one, that they did the works of their father.

44. Ye are of your father, the devil; and the lusts of your father ye will

Digitized by Google

do; *that is, ye are ready to perform*; he was a murderer from the beginning,

This may be supposed to refer to the murder of Abel by his brother Cain, a deed which took place at the beginning of the world, and to which he is supposed to have been instigated by the devil, the source of moral as well as of natural evil. The lusts or wishes of this being the Jews had shown themselves ready to fulfil, by endeavouring unjustly to take away the life of Jesus; which proved that they were his children, in as much as they bore his image. There was another circumstance likewise in which they resembled this evil being, and that was their disregard of the truth.

And abode not in the truth, *that is*, "*kept not the truth*," because there is no truth in him: when he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own; for he is a liar and the father of it.

The last clause of this verse has been translated in the following manner; "When any one speaketh a lie, he speaketh according to his own kindred: for his father also is a liar;" for this rendering, however, it is acknowledged that the Greek Text, as it now stands, lays no foundation, but it makes the passage so intelligible and natural, and the common rendering is so obscure and so unconnected, that I cannot help thinking it must have stood so originally. The change, too, which it requires is so inconsiderable, that the common reading may easily be supposed to have been made at first by accident or mistake, and to have afterwards crept into all our present copies.

It is observable that the Jews, in the latter period of their history at least, appear to speak of natural and moral evil as originating with an evil being, who is supposed to have power over the bodies and minds of men for this purpose. Thus we are told, 1 Chron. xxi. 1, that Satan stood up against Israel, and moved

Digitized by Google

David to number Israel. And in the New Testament, a woman who was long bound together by weakness, Satan is said to have bound eighteen years. Peter also, in his first address to his countrymen after the resurrection of Jesus, tells them that Jesus went about healing all such as were oppressed of the devil. Other examples of a like nature might be produced from the apostolic writings. Whether those who used this language conceived of the devil or Satan as a real being, or only as an allegorical personage, is not so easy to determine; but whatever might be their opinion, it does not appear that they derived it from divine revelation, which uniformly speaks of evil as well as good as proceeding from one and the same being. Their faith, therefore, is no rule for ours. They probably acquired this notion, or this language, during the Babylonish captivity, from the Chaldeans, among whom, as well as the Persians, the doctrine of a good and evil principle prevailed. Whether Jesus thought differently from the rest of his countrymen upon this subject, is a matter more of curiosity than importance: for as the notion prevailed before his time, and as he does not pretend to any revelation upon the subject, we are left at liberty to receive or reject it, as it may appear to us well or ill founded. As, however, he adopts the language of the people, it is probable that his opinion corresponded with theirs. Making use of this liberty, I have no scruple in saying that the existence of such a being as the devil, possessed of the powers usually ascribed to him, is highly improbable: for it is to suppose that the Deity has created a being who is continually altering or suspending the laws of nature, and tempting men to sin, without their having the power to resist his artifices. Christ now goes on to prove the resemblance of the Jews to the devil, from their dislike of the truth.

45. And because I tell you the truth, ye believe me not.

46. Which of you convinceth me, *rather*, "*convicteth me*," of sin? And

Digitized by Google

if I say the truth, why do ye not believe me?

Your disbelief of a person whose conduct is irreproachable, and whom therefore you have no reason to suspect of falsehood, can proceed from nothing but a dislike of the truth, with which I now charge you, and which makes you resemble the devil.

47. He that is of God, "*of a god-like disposition*," heareth God's words, "*hearkens to them*," Ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God.

Ye are of a diabolical temper and disposition. This language provoked the Jews to the highest degree of fury.

48. Then answered the Jews, and said unto him, Say we not well that thou art a Samaritan and hast a devil? *rather*, "*hast a dæmon?*"

Considering the enmity that subsisted between the Jews and Samaritans, to be called a Samaritan was almost the greatest reproach a man could suffer; but to this these Jews added that he had a dæmon; by which they meant to assert that he was mad, or disordered in his mind; for such was the condition of dæmoniacs.

This passage serves to show how much the common translation of the scriptures tends to mislead the English reader: for he would naturally be led to conclude that the devil mentioned in this verse is the same being with the devil mentioned in verse forty-four; whereas by the one, the Jews meant a dæmon, the spirit of some wicked man, supposed to occupy and torment the bodies of the living, producing madness, or other disorders of the understanding; by the other, Christ intended the author of all evil, who was indeed supposed

Digitized by Google

to tempt men to sin, but never to take permanent possession of their bodies.

49. Jesus answered, I have not a dæmon, but I honour my Father, and ye do dishonour me.

My actions and language are not those of a dæmoniac, but of one who obeys God; but for this you revile me.

50. And I seek not my own glory: there is one that seeketh and judgeth.

I am but little concerned about my reputation among such persons as you are; but there is one who will secure it, and judge between us; meaning God; and so great is the honour that he will confer upon me, that he will not permit any of those to die who believe in me and obey my doctrine.

51. Verily, verily, I say unto you, If a man keep my saying he shall never see death.

52. Then said the Jews unto him, Now we know that thou hast a dæmon. Abraham is dead, and the prophets; and thou sayest, If a man keep my saying he shall never taste of death.

53. Art thou greater than our father Abraham, which is dead; and the prophets are dead: Whom makest thou thyself?

The Jews suppose that the claim of Christ to secure immortality to his followers, originated with himself, and therefore charge him with the highest degree of arrogance. Jesus replies, by saying that the honour he had claimed was not assumed by himself; for in that case it would have been nothing more than an

Digitized by Google

empty boast; but that it was to be conferred upon him by a being whose authority they would not dispute, because they called him their God.

54. Jesus answered, If I honour myself, my honour is nothing: it is my Father that honoureth me, of whom ye say that he is your God.

55. Yet ye have not known him; but I know him, and if I should say I know him not, I shall be a liar, like unto you: but I know him and keep his saying.

The Jews, by asserting that God was their father, claimed some knowledge of him and resemblance to him: but this was a violation of truth, and Christ says that he should be guilty of a like violation of truth, if he should deny that he knew God: for he had a most intimate acquaintance with him, and followed his directions upon all occasions.

56. Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day, "*earnestly longed to see my day*," and he saw it and was glad.

You charge me with arrogance for my high pretensions: but I can assure you that I am not a person of so little consequence as you imagine; for so great were the blessings which Abraham was informed were to flow from me, that he earnestly desired to be favoured with a prospect of the period in which I should flourish; and he saw it by prophetic vision, and was highly transported. The absurd construction which the Jews put upon these words, either by mistake or design, was that he was contemporary with Abraham.

57. Then said the Jews unto him, Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham?

Digitized by Google

To this absurd or malignant construction of his language, Jesus makes no reply, but goes on to assert the great importance of his character, since it was fixed and predetermined in the divine mind, even before the days of Abraham.

58. Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was I am, *rather*, "*I am he.*"

So the same phrase is translated twice in the preceding part of the chapter; thus in verse 24, If ye believe not that *I am he*, ye shall die in your sins. In the Greek it is, *That I am.* So likewise, verse 28, When ye have lift up the son of man, then shall ye know that *I am he.* In the greek as before, *That I am.* Had our translators, therefore, acted consistently, they would have translated the same phrase, *I am he*, in this verse. This translation, which is undoubtedly the true one, would have destroyed the foundation of those extraordinary inferences which have been made from it. For some imagine that Christ meant to assert that he was the I AM, and therefore the same Being who announces himself under that appellation to the children of Israel, *Jehovah*, or the *eternal God:* while others conclude, from the same phrase, that he actually existed before Abraham, and even before the world. Whereas all that Christ meant to maintain was, that he was the light of the world, or the Messiah, before Abraham; that is, in the divine intentions or decrees, just in the same manner as he is called the Lamb slain before the foundation of the world, and Christians are said to be chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world. If it should be asked why Christ speaks of himself as existing before Abraham, and why the Lamb is said to be slain, and Christians chosen, before the foundation of the world, I answer, that it serves to illustrate the importance of the persons or things which are said thus to exist in the divine foreknowledge so long a time before hand. Important schemes men keep long in view before they execute them; and it is in order to give consequence, in our apprehensions, to

Digitized by Google

the purposes of the Supreme Being that they are represented as existing in his mind from the earliest periods of time, before Abraham, and before the world was made.

59. Then took they up stones to cast at him; but Jesus hid himself, and went out of the temple, [going through the midst of them; and so passed by.]

The last words are not to be found in many manuscripts, and probably, therefore, are not genuine. When Christ asserted that he, the Messiah, had been the subject of divine revelation to Abraham, he mentioned it, no doubt, as a proof of the honour that was done him by the Divine Being. When, therefore, he adds that he was the Messiah in the divine counsels, before the time of Abraham, he mentioned this likewise as a proof of higher honour. If the former declaration, therefore, was offensive to the Jews, the latter must be still more so: but as they put a false construction upon the former, so it is probable that, in the fury of their resentment, they put a like false construction upon the latter, and were hereby provoked to take up stones, with a view to put him to death.

REFLECTIONS.

1. Let us remember the odious light in which those who wilfully violate the truth, or who are unwilling to embrace it, are here represented. They are the children of the devil, the supposed patron of wickedness and author of all mischief; and well do they deserve to be ranked as members of this family: for there is no disposition so prejudicial to the individual, or so pernicious to society. When men are so hardened in vice, that they feel an aversion from the truth, and will not attend to the evidence upon which it is founded, they are incorrigible: for such men there is no remedy; they

Digitized by Google

must be abandoned to the fatal consequences of their errors and their vices, like the odious being whom they resemble. Where men can wilfully misrepresent the actions and characters of others, for gain or interest, from ambition or malice, great indeed must be the malignity of their tempers, and inconceivable the mischief which they may do in the world. Let us keep at the remotest distance from both these characters. To moral and religious truth, in whatever form it appears, and from whatever quarter it comes, let us give a welcome reception; to the consequences to which it may lead us let us chearfully submit, whatever they may be; remembering that in the final issue of things it is friendly to human happiness. From every aspersion upon the characters of men, which truth will not justify, let us carefully abstain, if we do not wish to prove our resemblance to the father of lies.

2. From the example of Christ we may learn to be indifferent to personal honour: he sought not his own glory, but left it to him, who, he knew, was able to secure it. In like manner let us not make reputation and honour the object of our pursuit: for this will lead us to court the applause of the vicious, whose esteem is a disgrace, and will tempt us to neglect our duty. Let it be our first concern to do the will of God, whose will is the standard of right; well assured that in doing this, honour will not be wanting, either in this world or in the next. If our motives should, notwithstanding, be supposed to be selfish, and our characters be reviled, let such treatment give us no concern, but let us say, after the example of Christ, There is one "that seeketh and judgeth:" into his hands let us chearfully commit our cause, not doubting that he will bring forth our righteousness as the light, and our judgment as the noon-day.

3. Let us ever be mindful of the important consequences which are here said to flow from keeping the sayings of Christ: a more powerful motive for right conduct and for attachment to Christ could not be suggested. It is not a mere prolongation of existence,

Digitized by Google

without enjoyments, or with such only as are stationary; but a life of refined and exalted pleasures, improving without any limits. How noble a prize! How worthy of every exertion and every sacrifice which we can make to secure it! The evil which we can suffer by keeping these sayings is temporary, but the pleasure resulting from it is eternal.

John ix. 1—23.

1. And as Jesus passed by, he saw a man which was blind from his birth.

In the last verse of the preceding chapter we left Jesus fleeing from the enraged Jews, who took up stones to put him to death: it is not likely, therefore, that the cure of the blind man, which is here recorded, took place immediately after: for the disciples would hardly have stopped him on such an occasion, to ask the question which follows. It is more probable that it happened at some distance of time, on the same day, or some succeeding one, as Jesus passed through the streets of Jerusalem.

2. And his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?

From the question which the disciples put to Jesus upon this occasion, it has been generally inferred that the Jews at this time believed the doctrine of the transmigration of souls, and that the followers of Jesus were infected with the same doctrine: for how, it may be asked, could they suppose this man's sins to be the cause of his being born blind, unless they had been committed in a prior state of being? But, as the disciples were probably ignorant at the time when they asked the question, when the man became blind, whether at his birth or afterwards, all that they desired to know might be whether, if his blindness had taken

Digitized by Google

place since his birth, it had been occasioned by his own sins; or, if at that time, whether it was owing to the sins of his parents.

It appears, indeed, from Josephus, the Jewish historian *, who flourished, however, some time after Christ, that the Pharisees believed in some kind of transmigration of souls; but the souls of the good only they supposed to return into other bodies, as the reward of their virtues; the souls of the wicked, they imagined, were immediately sent into a place of punishment, under the earth. But even this limited notion of transmigration was probably confined to a few of the learned, and had not yet become the common faith of the country: for we find that Martha had no knowledge of any such doctrine: the only expectation which she had of meeting her brother Lazarus again, was at the resurrection of the just; nor do we find any thing in the answer of Jesus to his disciples, which might lead one to think that he supposed that they referred to something done in a prior state.

3. Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned nor his parents; but that the works of God should be made manifest in him.

That is, he was not blind for his own sins, or for those of his parents, but in order that the power of God might be displayed in healing his blindness. Christ next proceeds to assign the reasons which induced him to cure this blindness immediately, although it was the sabbath-day, without deferring it to another day; his stay in the world was to be short, and, if the work were deferred, there might be no other opportunity.

4. I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh when no man can work.

* Antiq: xviii. 1—3. Bell. Jud. ii. 8, 14.

Digitized by Google

5. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.

In this last verse Jesus professes his resolution of maintaining the character which he had before assumed, viii. 12, of being the light of the world, while he continued to live in it, not only by the communication of moral instruction, but likewise by restoring the faculty of seeing to those who had been deprived of it. From the use which Christ here makes of the phrase, light of the world, applying it to his power of restoring sight to the blind, as well as to the removal of spiritual darkness, many have inferred that the miraculous powers which he possessed over the bodies of men, were intended to be emblematical of the spiritual benefits which he was qualified to confer upon their minds. Thus they suppose that healing the diseases of the body, in general, was intended to illustrate his performing a like service in respect to the maladies of the soul, and that particular miracles had a reference to particular spiritual benefits. But, whatever analogy may be found between the one and the other, there is no reason to suppose that this was the leading design of Christ's miracles.

6. When he had thus spoken, he spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle, and anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay,

This action was more likely to make a man who could see, blind, than to restore sight to one that had lost it: it was therefore probably intended to try the faith of the blind man, and to show to the spectators that it was the power of God which produced the effect, and not any natural means. The next thing which he directs him to perform had probably the same intention: it might also be intended to render the miracle more public.

7. And said unto him, Go, wash in

Digitized by Google

the pool, "*in the bath*," of Siloam (which is by interpretation *sent*.)

There is some resemblance between this order, and that given by Elisha to Naaman the Syrian, to go and wash himself seven times in the waters of Jordan; and the recollection of the issue in that instance might induce the blind man the more readily to comply with it.

He went his way, therefore, and washed, and came seeing.

Springs of water, in eastern countries, were deemed great blessings: that here referred to was called Siloam, in the Syriac language, or, according to the Hebrew, Siloah, which signifies *sent*, that is, sent of God; and as Christ had so often called himself, the sent of God, this circumstance induced the evangelist, (if the remark be really his, and not that of some transcriber, which has crept into the text) to explain the meaning of the name given to this bath; intimating thereby that there was some analogy between that name, and the character of Jesus; with what propriety I must leave the reader to judge.

8. The neighbours, therefore, and they which before had seen him that he was blind, said, Is not this he that sat and begged?

9. Some said, This is he; others said, He is like him; but he said, I am he.

Whatever doubts there might be respecting the identity of his person, his own declarations must have removed them.

10. Then said they unto him, How were thine eyes opened?

Digitized by Google

11. He answered and said, A man that is called Jesus made clay, and anointed my eyes, and said unto me, Go to the bath of Siloam, and wash; and I went, and washed, and I received sight.

12. Then said they unto him, Where is he? He said, I know not.

Jesus, as usual, had withdrawn himself from the public eye, after the performance of this miracle, that he might avoid the appearance of ostentation.

13. They brought to the Pharisees him that aforetime was blind.

By Pharisees we are here to understand the Jewish council, or Sanhedrim, which principally consisted of persons of that sect; and the design of bringing him to this court was to have the pretended miracle thoroughly sifted by this learned body, and the imposture of it exposed. The result, however, was quite contrary to what they expected; the reality of the miracle being established beyond contradiction.

14. And it was the sabbath-day, when Jesus made the clay and opened his eyes.

15. Then again the Pharisees also asked him how he had received his sight. He said unto them, He put clay upon my eyes, and I washed, and do see.

16. Therefore said some of the Pharisees, This man is not of God, because he keepeth not the sabbath-day.

Digitized by Google

Not being able to disprove the miracle, they find fault with the time when it was performed, because it was the sabbath-day, and infer hence that he could not be sent of God, as he pretended to be, but must be an impostor, because he violated the sabbath. Others of them, who were more rational and candid in their way of judging, asked how an impostor could work such miracles; justly concluding that the Divine Being could not give his attestation to an impostor.

Others said, How can a man that is a sinner do such miracles? And there was a division among them.

17. They say unto the blind man again, What sayest thou of him, that he hath opened thy eyes? He said, He is a prophet.

18. But the Jews did not believe concerning him, that he had been blind, and received his sight, until they called the parents of him that had received his sight.

By the Jews mentioned here we are to understand the leaders of the Jews, or the members of the Sanhedrim, who, in verse fifteen, are called Pharisees. It seems they did not give full credit to the relation of the man who had been blind; suspecting perhaps that there was some collusion between him and Jesus. They therefore summon before them those who must be deemed unexceptionable evidences of the reality of his blindness, and of the time when it had commenced.

19. And they asked them, saying, Is this your son, who, ye say, was born blind? How then doth he now see?

Digitized by Google

20. His parents answered them, and said, We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind:

21. But by what means he now seeth we know not, or who hath opened his eyes we know not; he is of age; ask him: he shall speak for himself.

To the most material circumstances which it was desirable to ascertain, his being their son and being born blind, they bear a clear and decided testimony; but about the author of his cure, or the manner in which it was produced, they do not choose to speak, for a reason which is immediately assigned. The age at which the Jews admitted persons to give evidence is said to be thirteen; the person here spoken of, therefore, must have been advanced to that age at least.

22. These words spake his parents, because they feared the Jews: for the Jews had agreed already, that if any man did confess that he was Christ, he should be put out of the synagogue, *rather*, "*should be forbidden the synagogue.*"

We find from vii. 41, that many began to surmise that Jesus was the Messiah. This induced the Sanhedrim to pass the decree here referred to, in order to stop, as they imagined, the progress of that opinion.

23. Therefore said his parents, He is of age, ask him.

They were afraid to say any thing about the author of his cure, lest they should incur this sentence; and left to their son all the odium and danger which might attend any declaration upon that subject.

Digitized by Google

REFLECTIONS.

1. The reply which Jesus makes to the question of his disciples, when they asked him the cause of the blindness of a miserable object, should teach us to be careful that we do not attribute bodily distempers or personal evils of any kind to the divine displeasure; as if they were occasioned by the sins of the afflicted, or by those of any persons connected with them. To this fault the Jews were much inclined, as we find from this instance, and some others which occur in the histories of the evangelists. In them it might be excusable, since their condition as a state, if not as individuals, was under a particular providence, in consequence of which the punishment of idolatry and of other offences immediately followed the commission of these crimes: but it is not excusable in Christians and Protestants of the present day, (who are, however, equally inclined to it) since they profess to believe that miracles have ceased since the age of the apostles. The light in which Christianity teaches us to conceive of the afflictions of life, is that of chastisements from the hands of a kind father, intended for the benefit of his children, and therefore to be regarded as proofs of love, and not of hatred; as instruments of good, and not of evil. In this view let us always regard them, whether they befal ourselves or other persons. Grievous indeed would the burthen of affliction prove, if to the violence of pain, or the sorrow of disappointment, were added the dreadful apprehension of divine displeasure.

2. The motive which Christ here assigns for performing this miracle without delay, ought to induce us to dispatch every important business of life with the like expedition. "The night is coming when no man can work." We know not indeed the exact time of our dissolution, as Christ did; but it cannot be far

Digitized by Google

from any of us; and if, besides, it be uncertain, we derive thence an additional motive for diligence; since it may be much nearer than we imagine. Is there then any valuable service, which you are able to perform for God or for your fellow-creatures? Is the world involved in errors, which you are qualified to correct? Are you able to pour the light of truth upon the benighted understanding? Can you assuage the violence of pain, or supply the wants of the distressed? Can you, in any way, lessen the miseries or increase the enjoyments of the human race? Do it without delay: withhold not good from him to whom it is due, while it is in the power of your hands to do it. Another opportunity for this purpose may never occur. If you miss it by delay, you will at least lose the satisfaction which accompanies the performance of benevolent actions, in this life, and the reward which awaits them in the next; if you are not exposed to the doom of the unprofitable servant, who hid his lord's talent in a napkin.

3. This story affords an example of the advantage which truth derives from opposition. Had no enquiry been made into this extraordinary fact; had no attempt been set on foot to prove that it had no foundation, and that the pretended author was an impostor; we should not have had that incontrovertible evidence in support of it which we have at present. Neither the man born blind, but now restored to sight, nor his parents, would have been brought before the Jewish Sanhedrim; nor should we have had the testimony of enemies as well as that of friends, who could not gainsay or contradict it. Let us not be afraid, therefore, of submitting any sentiment which we embrace to discussion; but rather ask and court the most rigorous examination. If it be true, it will be established, if false, overthrown, by this means. The most generally acknowledged truths were at first established in this manner.

4. We may observe, in connection with the preceding remark, how fruitless and impotent human force

Digitized by Google

is when employed against the truth. The Jewish Sanhedrim had passed a decree that whosoever acknowledged Jesus to be the Christ should be prohibited the synagogue. Vain and presumptuous men, to think that any decrees of theirs could prevent the truth from being acknowledged, or stop its progress in the world! As well might men attempt to stop the progress of the river which rolls its mighty waters to the ocean, or to arrest the great luminary of day, in its progress in the heavens. Great is the truth, and it will prevail; and the opposition which it meets with from its enemies only serves to hasten its diffusion.

John ix. 24. to the end.

24. Then again called they the man that was blind, and said unto him, Give God the praise: we know that this man is a sinner.

The miracle performed upon this man had excited so much attention, that the Jewish Sanhedrim thought proper to inquire into the fact, and for this purpose summoned the man and his parents to appear before them. After the closest investigation of the matter, they are obliged to acknowledge the reality of the cure, but decline making from it the natural and obvious inference, that the person performing it must be a prophet, or divinely authorized teacher, and desire the man to give God the praise of his recovered sight, and to regard Jesus as an impostor; for that is what they meant by calling him a sinner.

25. He answered and said, Whether he be a sinner or no, I know not, *that is*, "*I do not now choose to say*;" one thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see.

Digitized by Google

That he does not here mean to express any doubt about the character of Jesus, is evident from what he says of him in other parts of the narrative, where he gives a clear and decided opinion.

26. Then said they to him again, What did he to thee? How opened he thine eyes?

These questions they put to him a second time, in hopes of discovering some inconsistency or contradiction in his account, which might afford them an opportunity of destroying the credibility of the whole story. To put a stop to such troublesome questions, which could answer no useful purpose, the man insinuates that they proposed them with a view to their becoming his disciples, which he knew they could not bear.

27. He answered them, I have told you already, and ye did not hear.

You did not regard what I said: for, if you had, my story was so plain as to leave no room for further questions.

Wherefore would ye hear it again? Will ye also be his disciples?

28. Then they reviled him, and said, Thou art his disciple; but we are Moses' disciples.

29. We know that God spake unto Moses, *rather*, "*by Moses*;" as for this fellow, "*this man*," we know not whence he is, *or*, "*whence he comes.*"

We know that Moses spoke to our fathers by divine authority: but by what authority this man speaks we know not; only we are sure it is not by that of God.

Digitized by Google

30. The man answered and said unto them, Why herein is a marvellous thing, *or*, *according to some copies*, "*this one thing is wonderful*," that ye know not from whence he is, "*whence he comes*," and yet he hath opened my eyes.

31. Now we know that God heareth not sinners, "*heareth not impostors*;" but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doth his will, him he heareth.

In this language of the man restored to sight, a miraculous cure is considered as a favour conferred by God upon the person by whom it is performed, at his request. Such a favour, he justly argues, would not be granted to an impostor, who professed to teach in the name of God, without any authority from him; but might be easily supposed to be bestowed upon a person of eminent piety and unblemished character, who asked it of God. Such a character, therefore, they ought to conclude Jesus to be, by whom God had just wrought so extraordinary a miracle.

32. Since the world began was it not heard, *or*, "*never was it heard yet*," that any man opened the eyes of one that was born blind.

33. If this man were not of God, he could do nothing, *that is*, *nothing of this kind, or no such miracle.*

The reasoning contained in these two last verses seems to be this: If an ordinary miracle cannot be performed, without enjoying the favour of God; much

Digitized by Google

less reasonable is it to conclude that so extraordinary a work as restoring a man born blind to his sight, the like to which was never heard of in the history of the world, could have been performed by a person who did not enjoy that honour, and was not really sent by him for that purpose.

The last verse affords an example of, what there will be occasion to remark in other places, the necessity of sometimes interpreting general expressions in a limited sense. "If this man were not of God, he could do nothing:" where common sense teaches us that the speaker cannot mean nothing at all, but nothing of the kind here referred to.

34. They answered and said unto him, Thou wast altogether born in sins: and dost thou teach us?

This is a strong proverbial expression, signifying a great propensity to sin. In this sense David says of himself, "I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me," Ps. li. 7. And in another place, of wicked men he says, "They are estranged from the womb, they go astray as soon as they are born," lviii. 4. Similar expressions occur in modern languages. Thus it is not unusual to say of a man who has a strong propensity to dishonesty, that he was born a knave.

And they cast him out, *rather,* **"*turned him out.*"**

Instead of dismissing him from the court, they ordered their servants to turn him out, in a contemptuous manner, as a man who had behaved with insolent rudeness.

35. Jesus heard that they had turned him out, and when he had found him, he said unto him, Dost thou believe on the Son of God?

Digitized by Google

We see from this passage that *Son of God* signifies the same thing as *Messiah*, and has none of that mysterious meaning which some attribute to it. For what Jesus intended to ask this man was, undoubtedly, whether he believed in the Messiah, in order, if his faith had been defective, to have given him some assistance, as a compensation for the injuries which had been offered him. The title, Son of God, seems to have originated in a promise made by Nathan to David, in the name of God, 2. Sam. vii. 14, that he would be a father to his seed, and that his seed should be his son.

36. He answered and said, Who is he, Lord, "*teacher*," that I might, "*that I may*," believe on him?

37. And Jesus said unto him, Thou hast both seen him, and it is he that talketh with thee: *thou both hearest and seest him.*

38. And he said, Teacher, I believe; and he worshipped him, *rather*, "*fell down before him.*"

39. And Jesus said, For judgment, "*for punishment*," I am come into this world, that they which see not might see, and they which see might be made, "*might become*" blind.

Jesus alludes here, as usual, to the miracle which he had performed upon the blind man; and his meaning seems to be this: I am come into the world, that those who are humble, and sensible of their ignorance, may receive light; but that those who are proud, and obstinately attached to their own opinions, may be reckoned blind. The Pharisees understood him sufficiently to perceive that he spake of moral blindness, and ask

Digitized by Google

with indignation, whether he reckoned them in the number of the blind?

40. And some of the Pharisees which were with him heard these words, and said unto him, Are we blind also?

41. Jesus said unto them, If ye were blind ye should have no sin; but now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth.

That is, if you were really blind, you would have no guilt, since you could not have abused the light; but now that you possess so much knowledge, you are criminal; for you do not act agreeably to it.

The sin here referred to is that of rejecting his gospel, which was the conduct of the learned Pharisees, while it was received by many of the common people with gladness.

REFLECTIONS.

1. We see whose example they are following, who employ reproach and violence, instead of argument, to defend their cause; and to oppose the doctrines of their adversaries: it is the example of Jewish priests and scribes; of Sadducees and Pharisees, who principally composed the Jewish council; of men whom Jesus describes as proud, obstinate hypocrites; who, being incorrigible, and incapable of receiving the truth, were doomed by Providence to certain destruction; for thus it was that these men acted. If any one declared Jesus to be the Messiah, they determined to prohibit him their synagogue, and to deprive him of the benefit of public worship; if any one reasons with them on the

Digitized by Google

justice of his claims to a divine mission, they silence his arguments with reproaches, and turn him out of their presence with disgrace. Conduct this that was consistent enough with the character of bigotted Jews, who were conscious that they had no other method to defend a bad cause! But have Christians trodden in the same steps, while they exclaim against the folly, injustice and wickedness of such behaviour in others towards them? Can they have imitated it in their treatment of each other? Have they prohibited men their synagogues, turned them out of their society, and loaded them with every species of reproach, not for immoral conduct, which would be a justifiable cause of separation, but for maintaining the truth, and recovering their sight after they had been blind? Ecclesiastical history contains but too many memorials of the disgraceful fact; and modern times are not without examples of the practice. But let not Christianity bear the reproach; the wisdom which is from above disowns any relation to such men; they are men actuated by worldly views, and not by those which revelation inspires. These are such as have corrupted the truth as it is in Jesus, or who are actuated by the blind zeal or interested motives of those whom Christ constantly opposed and condemned.

2. We learn from this story that men who possess but little knowledge, but are sensible of their ignorance, are more likely to arrive at truth than those who have much learning, accompanied with pride. These were exactly the circumstances of the blind man and the Pharisees. Providence had denied to him the use of that organ by which knowledge, or at least what is called learning, is principally acquired; but he had common sense, a general knowledge of the principles of religion, and a mind open to conviction. These few advantages enabled him to perceive and admit the claims of Jesus to the character of a divine teacher, and even of the Messiah, although not accompanied with any of that external splendour which the Jews expected in this character; while the learned members of the council, with all their knowledge of the law and of the tra-

Digitized by Google

ditions of the elders, were incapable of perceiving these plain and important truths. Let not persons, then, who esteem themselves wise and learned, disdain to listen to the reasonings of those who are in an ordinary situation in life; for such men are often qualified to become their instructors and guides. Nor let any who are placed in this situation be dissatisfied with their lot: if they enjoy not pleasures possessed by men of higher rank, they are at least exempted from their prejudices.

3. We see that knowledge, if men act not agreeably to it, only serves to render them the more criminal; if ye were blind, ye would have no sin, but now ye see, your sin remaineth, saith Jesus. This observation furnishes matter of serious alarm to those who remain unbelievers, while they are furnished with the means of ascertaining the divine origin of the Christian revelation; and to those Christians, who, knowing the truth of their religion, do not practice the duties which it requires.

John x. 1—21.

1. Verily, verily I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber, *rather*, " *a murderer.*"

In the last chapter we have an account of a dispute between the man restored to sight and the Pharisees, respecting the claim of Jesus to be a prophet or divinely authorized teacher: this he asserted to be fully established by the miracle which he had wrought; while they maintained that he was, notwithstanding that extraordinary work, an impostor. In this discourse Christ holds out some other distinguishing marks of a man's having a divine commission; such as disinterestedness, exposing his life for the sheep, and other

Digitized by Google

things. In the forty-ninth verse of that chapter, Christ mentions the readiness with which the humble would receive his gospel; the same thing is further illustrated here by the parable of the sheep and the shepherd. To both these circumstances Christ probably refers upon the present occasion; his design was to show the justness of his claims; and that if there were some by whom they were rejected, there were others by whom they were admitted. It is the opinion of Sir Isaac Newton that what suggested to Jesus the following simile, was the circumstance of his beholding, near the temple, folds or pens of sheep, brought thither for sacrifice.

Jesus begins with asserting that none were duly authorized teachers in the Messiah's kingdom, but such as had their commission from Heaven, and that all who engaged in the work, in any other manner, were actuated by private and selfish views: such persons exposed themselves to as much suspicion as he would be liable to, who, instead of entering by the door into the sheep-fold, should climb over the wall.

2. But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep.

By coming that way, a man shows that he is the shepherd: for it is the regular way of entrance. So, by entering the Messiah's kingdom by me, men show that they are properly authorized teachers. Next follows a description of a shepherd.

3. To him the porter openeth, and the sheep hear his voice, and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out.

4. And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice:

Digitized by Google

5. And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers.

This is all a description of a Jewish shepherd, of the attention paid by him to his sheep, and by them to him, and was intended to express the concern which true teachers manifest for the benefit of those whom they instruct, and the sagacity which good men possess in distinguishing false teachers from true. Christ plainly alludes to the customs of eastern countries, where it is usual for the shepherd to call his sheep by different names, and to make them follow him by that means,

6. This parable spake Jesus unto them: but they understood not what things they were which he spake unto them.

Any figurative discourse is called in the gospels a parable, and therefore that name is given to the preceding, although it corresponds not to the ideas usually annexed to that term. As it was not understood by the disciples, Jesus proceeds to explain his meaning, and to carry on the simile.

7. Then said Jesus unto them again, Verily, verily I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep.

Here he explains what he had said in verse the first.

8. All that ever came before me, *rather*, "*all that ever came in my name*," *that is*, *as the door of the sheep*, are thieves and murderers; but the sheep did not hear them.

Digitized by Google

As there was at this time a general expectation of the Messiah among the Jews, several persons had assumed that character; such as Theudas and Judas Gaulonites, and perhaps others: but Jesus here declares that they had no claim to it, and that they came for their own private ends, and that good men did not listen to their pretensions, but only persons of the same selfish character with themselves.

9. I am the door: by me if any man enter in, *not any man, but any sheep*, he shall be saved, "*it will be safe*," and shall go in and out, and find pasture.

He that enters into the kingdom of heaven by me, may esteem himself as secure as the sheep which is under the care of the shepherd, and which goes to the fold and returns from it, and finds pasture.

10. The thief cometh not but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I am come that they may have life, and that they might have it more abundantly, *rather*, "*that they*," *i. e. the sheep*, "*might have abundance.*"

Jesus still speaks of himself as a shepherd, and his followers as sheep. Others, says he, who have come in the character of shepherds, have rather deserved the names of robbers; for they have come to them for their own private ends, to plunder the sheep, or to take away their lives; but I am come to preserve their lives, and that they may have abundance of every thing which they want. In the preceding verse he had said that he was the door, and that whosoever entered by him should be saved, or safe, and should go in and out and find pasture; here he repeats the same thing, with some variety of language; for he says

Digitized by Google

that he came that they might have life, and might have abundance.

11. I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life, "*exposeth his life*," for the sheep.

That this is the meaning of Christ's language is evident, from what he says of the hireling in the next verse.

12. But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep and fleeth, and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep.

13. The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling and careth not for the sheep.

As the owner of the sheep will expose his life in their defence, because they are his property, but the shepherd, who is paid for his service, only consults his own safety when they are in danger, and leaves them to be devoured by wild beasts; so is the case in respect to me and other persons, who have lately claimed, or may hereafter claim, the character of shepherds. When threatened with danger, they desert their followers and the cause in which they were engaged: on the contrary, I hazard my life for their benefit, and shall in reality lose it in their service. This seems to be the meaning of these verses. The pretensions of Christ to be a divine messenger had been denied by the Jews, who examined the miracle performed on the man restored to sight: this circumstance might appear to some, who were disaffected towards him, as an imputation upon his character, and to his disciples a source of grief; but he obviates the apprehensions of

Digitized by Google

the one and of the other, by observing, in the next verse, that there were some who acknowledged his pretensions, and that he knew what kind of persons they were: with their approbation he was satisfied.

14. I am the good shepherd, and I know my sheep, and am known of mine.

To be esteemed by men, however, was not all the honour he possessed: he enjoyed also the approbation of God, and was acquainted with his counsels, particularly with the purposes which he proposed to answer by the death of his son.

15. As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep.

16. And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice.

The sheep of another fold are persons who did not belong to the Jewish nation, or Gentiles: they would listen to Christ, when preached to them by his apostles.

And there shall be one fold and one shepherd.

That is, they shall be no longer two separate bodies, under the direction of different masters, as at present, but shall be united together in one body, under me their spiritual leader and guide.

17. Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again, *rather,* **"*that I may receive it again.*"**

The phrase used in our version, *take it again,* seems to imply that Christ was active in recovering life;

Digitized by Google

whereas the original implies no more than receiving life again, without determining whether it be accomplished by the person spoken of, or by another; although common sense leads us to understand it in the latter sense; for nothing can be more absurd than to suppose that a person once dead can restore himself to life. Christ has justly said that the Father loved him, because he laid down his life for the sheep; because nothing could be a higher instance of obedience to his will, or a stronger proof of benevolence to mankind, even although he had the prospect of receiving it again.

18. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power, "*I have authority*," *for so the word always signifies, to lay it down, and I have authority to receive it again: this commandment have I received of my Father, *that is, the authority before mentioned.***

To the proof that Christ had before given of his being a good shepherd, from his laying down his life for the sheep, it might be objected, that it was taken from him by force, and that his death was unavoidable, and had in it, therefore, no merit. This objection he obviates by saying that he laid down his life voluntarily, having authority from God to do so, as well as to resume it. Our Lord's meaning in this passage is illustrated by what he says to Peter, when he employed his sword for defending his master, Matt. xxvi. 53, "Thinkest thou that I cannot pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?" meaning that he had it in his power to avoid death by the assistance of his Father, if he had been disposed to avail himself of it,

* Porter's Defence of Unitarianism, p. 123, &c. Hobhouse's Letters to Dr. Randolph, p. 133, &c.

Digitized by Google

which is what he intimates, although more obscurely, in this verse. The language of Jesus upon this occasion was so unintelligible to many of the Jews, who had hitherto followed him, that they concluded he was mad, and that what he spoke was the effusion of phrenzy; others, however, could see in his language no evidence of insanity.

19. There was a division, therefore, again among the Jews for these sayings.

20. And many of them said, He hath a dæmon, and is mad; why hear ye him?

This verse affords a plain proof that persons who were deemed mad among the Jews were said to have a dæmon; other disorders, however, such as the epilepsy, were attributed to the same cause.

21. Others said, These are not the words of him that hath a dæmon, *they contain no evidence of madness.* Can a dæmon open the eyes of the blind?

Besides the good sense which appears in his language, he has wrought a miracle, which could not be the work of a dæmon.

REFLECTIONS.

1. Let Christians rejoice in the well founded claim which their master has to the character of the good shepherd: he conducts them in a safe way; provides pasture for their support; values their interests as much or more than his own; and, where it is necessary

Digitized by Google

to promote them, not only exposes his life to danger, but voluntarily gives himself up to certain death. Where shall we find such a leader? What stronger proof of disinterested regard could he have given? To this regard many have pretended; but when their professions have been brought to the trial, they have appeared to be utterly false. But Christ has given the best proof of sincerity which any human being could give. For greater love hath no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. What encouragement do we derive hence, for relying upon all his declarations, especially upon that most important one, That he came from God, and had a commission from Heaven. Nothing can be more certain than that he thought himself so authorized: for he sacrifices his life in support of that character; and the miracles which he wrought prove that he could not be mistaken. Let us place ourselves under the conduct of such a shepherd without fear, and trust ourselves entirely to his directions.

2. Let Christians endeavour to maintain the character which Christ here attributes to his followers, that of sheep; inoffensive and harmless animals. Much indeed do they depart from it, when they suffer themselves to be inflamed by violent passions; to indulge in abusive language and injurious actions. Too often have Christians hereby deserved the character of wolves, rather than of sheep, tearing and devouring all around them.

3. Let those who are employed in teaching the truths of religion, encourage themselves, as Christ does, with obtaining proselytes among the wise and virtuous part of mankind. There are many who will reject their doctrines, from fear of shame or of injuring their worldly interests, or some vicious inclination; but men of honest and unprejudiced minds will listen to their voice, and with the approbation and attachment of such persons they ought to be satisfied; they are the only men whose good opinion is worth regarding.

Digitized by Google

John x. 22. to the end.

22. And it was at Jerusalem the feast of the dedication, and it was winter, *rather*, "*rainy weather.*"

So the word signifies, and the connection seems to require. The festival here mentioned was instituted by Judas Maccabeus, in commemoration of purifying the temple, after it had been defiled by Antiochus Epiphanes.

23. And Jesus walked in the temple, in Solomon's porch.

He walked in this place as a shelter from the weather.

24. Then came the Jews round about him, and said unto him, How long dost thou make us to doubt? *or,* "*How long dost thou hold us in suspence?*" If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly.

This question was proposed with an insidious design, that if Jesus had declared himself to be the Christ, or Messiah, they might have ground on which to prefer an accusation against him. Jesus was aware of their design, and therefore avoids the snare which they had laid for him.

25. Jesus answered them, I told you, and ye believed not, *not told them that he was the Christ, but told them the words that follow,* the works

Digitized by Google

that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me.

These are sufficient to inform you whether I am the Messiah or not: if my miracles are more numerous and extraordinary than those of any preceding prophet, they will authorize you in making that conclusion: if not, you are not obliged to receive me in that character.

26. But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep.

Here the verse should have terminated. The words that follow connect best with the next verse. You possess not the character and disposition which are necessary to fit men for believing in me, and for becoming my disciples.

As I said unto you,

27. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.

This he had said before, in verse the fourth: he refers to it again, in order to remove all surprise or regret at the rejection of him by some of his countrymen. He now subjoins some important privileges which his sheep should enjoy, as an inducement to his hearers to assume that character.

28. And I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them, "*tear them*," out of my hand.

Sheep, however well guarded, it is possible to take from the shepherd and destroy; but it is not so with mine: for I give them eternal life, of which no one can deprive them. This power of preserving their lives I derive from the Divine Being, whose will nothing can resist.

Digitized by Google

29. My Father which gave them me is greater than all, and no man is able to tear them out of my Father's hand.

30. I and my Father are one, *or*, "*I and my Father are the same thing.*"

That is, as the power of the Father is communicated to me, or rather is under my direction, to be in my hands, is the same thing as being in his, and is equally safe to the sheep. This passage affords no countenance to the strange doctrine that Christ and God, although distinct Beings, make but one person; but has a very plain and obvious meaning; implying no more than that to be in the hands of the Son, is the same thing as being in the hands of the Father.

31. Then the Jews took up stones again to stone him.

Offended, as we shall see presently, not at the last part of his speech, but at the first, in which he had called God his Father.

32. Jesus answered them, Many good works have I showed you from my Father; *many beneficent miracles have I performed among you*; for which of those works do ye stone me?

33. The Jews answered him, saying, For a good work we stone thee not; but for blasphemy, and because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God.

The high offence which the Jews take at the supposition that Jesus made himself God, renders it

Digitized by Google

highly improbable that he really assumed that character, which, however, many Christians imagine to have been the case.

34. Jesus said unto them, Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are Gods?

The Psalms, in which this passage is found, Ps. lxxxii. 6, are here included under the general appellation of the law, as in other parts of the New Testament.

35. If he called them Gods, unto whom the word of God came*, and the scripture cannot be broken, "*cannot be set aside*,"

36. Say ye of him whom the Father hath sanctified and sent into the world, "Thou blasphemest," because I said, I am the son of God?

These verses may be paraphrased in the following manner. If the scriptures, the language of which cannot be arraigned, call magistrates Gods, who only exercise their office by a commission from Heaven, can you justly accuse me of blasphemy, for calling myself the Son of God, who have been sent into the world on an extraordinary commission, and qualified for my office by God himself? The word *sanctified* is borrowed from the Jewish ritual, where vessels and persons are said to be sanctified, when they are prepared for divine worship, or for any religious service. When Christ, therefore, speaks of himself as sanctified, he means prepared or qualified for the work in which he was engaged. This last verse serves to show, what

* With whom the word of God was, to whom it appertained to pronounce what the word, command, law of God is; for this was the duty of a magistrate in Israel.

Cappe's Crit. Rem. Vol. 1. *p.* 231.

Digitized by Google

I before referred to, that the circumstance which gave so much offence to the Jews was not his saying, that he and the Father were one, but his calling God his father, which, as the Jews thought, or at least pretended to think, implied some peculiar derivation from the Divine Being, and something of a divine nature, which it was highly criminal in a man to affect. To this objection Jesus replies, by showing from the scriptures, that men were called Gods when invested with authority by the Divine Being, and that therefore he was assuming no divine honours by calling himself the Son of God. He directs their attention to his miracles, however, and not to his own declarations, as the best proof of his claim to the character of the Son of God.

37. If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not.

If I do not those things which none but God can perform, give no credit to my pretensions.

38. But if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works, that ye may know and believe that the Father is in me, and I in him.

Regard the attestation which he gives to my character, and believe that he is in me, working the miracles which I perform, and I in him, by the knowledge which I have of his counsels, and by the obedience which I pay to his will.

39. Therefore they sought again to take him, but he escaped out of their hands.

They intended not to stone him, as before, for the crime of blasphemy, from which he had vindicated himself; but to bring him before the Jewish council, who, they knew, were desirous to have him apprehended and brought before them.

Digitized by Google

40. And he went away again, beyond Jordan, *rather*, "*by the side of Jordan*," into the place where John at first baptized, and there he abode.

He thought that by visiting this place he should recal to their recollection what John had said of him, and induce them to believe in him; and the event proved that he judged rightly.

41. And many resorted unto him, and said, John did no miracle.

In that respect he was inferior to most other prophets; but what he said respecting this man proves him to deserve that character.

But all things that John spake of this man were true.

Such declarations as that he should work miracles, be far superior to himself, &c.

42. And many believed on him there.

REFLECTIONS.

1. Let Christians rejoice in the firm foundation on which their faith in the divine mission of Jesus, and the truth of the Christian religion rests. It is built upon miracles, which are the sole work of God in every case, and in the present instance the attestation of the Deity to the declarations of a man professing to have authority from Heaven to instruct the world. To such testimony no reasonable man can refuse to yield: on authority so supported every one may rely. To the simple declarations of a man of an upright and benevolent character much credit is due, especially if

Digitized by Google

his declarations are made in opposition to his own interest, and at the hazard of his life: for nothing but a firm persuasion of the truth could induce any one to affirm what exposes him to so much danger. But it is possible that even a good man may be deceived; that, being misled by the illusions of his own imagination, he may conceive that he has received communications from heaven which were never made, and that, being himself mistaken, he may attempt to impose upon others. But where to the declarations of a man is added the attestation of God, expressed not perhaps always in words, but by facts, which speak a stronger language than any words, we have every security which we can desire for the truth. There is here no room for error or mistake, unless God himself can be mistaken. Such, Christians, is the ground of your faith, and, while it rests upon this foundation, the arts and sophistry of man will attempt in vain to shake it.

2. What reason have we to rejoice in the promise here made by Christ to his sheep, that he will give them eternal life, and that they shall never be destroyed! A being that will never end; that is to be spent in the best society, and in the enjoyment of the purest delights; which, as it extends in duration, will continually increase in happiness, without any limits, is indeed a valuable gift, in comparison with which every other object of human ambition sinks into nothing, whether it be wealth or power or honour. But who is it that is to bestow so great a blessing, and to communicate so inestimable a prize? Is it only a man, who had all the weakness of human nature, and was himself obliged to submit to death? However weak in himself, he is strong in the power of God. He and the Father are one. The power which belongs to the Father is intrusted to the direction of the Son, and will be employed by him for fulfilling the promises which he has made to his people; particularly, for fulfilling that important promise which assures them of a resurrection from the dead, and the possession of an endless life. On him let us rely, without fear,

Digitized by Google

for all which he has promised, however great or difficult to be accomplished it may appear.

John xi. 1—44*.

1. Now a certain man was sick, named Lazarus of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha.

2. It was that Mary which anointed the Lord with ointment, "*with perfumes*," and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick.

3. Therefore his sister sent unto him, saying, Lord, *Master*, behold he whom thou lovest is sick; *hoping that he would come and heal him.*

4. When Jesus heard that, he said, This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby.

* What is related in the last chapter took place at the feast of dedication (verse twenty-two) which was celebrated about the time of our December; but the resurrection of Lazarus, mentioned in this chapter, happened but a short time before the passover (verse fifty-five) which fell in March: there was, therefore, an interval of about three months between the two periods of those miracles and discourses, of which John gives no account, because they are recorded in the other evangelists. (See Bishop Pearce.) The usual reasons assigned for the omission of so remarkable a story as that of the resurrection of Lazarus, in the gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke, is, that Lazarus was still alive when they wrote, and that a circumstantial relation of his being raised from the dead would have exposed him to danger from the unbelieving Jews; but that being dead, when John wrote his gospel, *he* was under no such restraint.

Digitized by Google

This sickness is not designed to produce a permanent death, but only a temporary interruption of life, that God may honour his Son, by enabling him to raise Lazarus from the dead.

5. Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.

They were his disciples, and showed their respect to him by frequently entertaining him at their house.

6. When he had heard, therefore, that he was sick, he abode two days still in the same place where he was.

This he did that there might be no doubt of his death, when he came to restore him to life.

7. Then after that saith he to his disciples, Let us go into Judæa again.

8. His disciples say unto him, Master, the Jews of late sought to stone thee, and goest thou thither again?

9. Jesus answered, Are there not twelve hours in the day? If any man walk in the day, he stumbleth not, because he seeth the light of this world,

10. But if a man walk in the night he stumbleth, because there is no light in him, *rather*, "*in it*," *that is, in the world.*

By this obscure language Christ intimates that there was no occasion to fear that his life would be taken away, before the time appointed by infinite wisdom. The disciples had expressed their surprise at the pro-

Digitized by Google

posal which he made of returning to Judæa, from which he had lately retired, because the Jews sought to kill him. To this he replies, by saying, that as the man who walketh during any of the twelve hours into which the day is divided, without excepting even the last of them, is not afraid of stumbling and falling, because he has the light of the sun; so he had no reason to fear he should fall by the hands of his enemies during that day or time of service allotted him by Divine Providence.

11. These things said Jesus, and after that he saith unto them, Our friend Lazarus sleepeth, but I go that I may awake him out of sleep.

Under this soft image does Jesus express the death of Lazarus, of which he was now informed by divine communication; and, pursuing the same image, intimates his purpose of raising him from the dead, by saying that he was going to awake him.

12. Then said his disciples, Lord, if he sleep he shall do well.

His sleeping is a symptom of the return of health. This they said with a view to divert him from his purpose of returning to Judæa: If he sleep and is doing well, what occasion is there for thy going to see him?

13. Howbeit, Jesus spake of his death: but they thought he had spoken of taking of rest in sleep.

14. Then said Jesus unto them plainly, Lazarus is dead:

15. And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent ye may believe;

Digitized by Google

I am glad I was absent, on account of the confirmation which your faith in me will receive by seeing him raised from the dead.

Nevertheless, let us go unto him.

16. Then said Thomas, which is called Didymus, *which signifies the same in Greek, as Thomas in Hebrew*, unto his fellow-disciples, Let us also go, that we may die with him.

That is, either with Christ, or with Lazarus: for he considered their returning to Judæa, at this time, on account of the temper which the Jews had lately manifested, to be exposing themselves to certain death.

17. Then when Jesus came, *(some manuscripts and versions add, "to Bethany," and the next verse seems to require this addition)* he found that he had lain in the grave four days already.

Of this he was informed by the friends of Lazarus, and not by the same divine communication which acquainted him with his death.

18. Now Bethany, *mentioned in the last verse*, was nigh unto Jerusalem, about fifteen furlongs off, *or, about two miles.*

This is mentioned, to account for the presence of several inhabitants of Jerusalem.

19. And many of the Jews came to Martha and Mary, to comfort them concerning their brother.

Digitized by Google

This shows that Lazarus and his sisters were persons above an ordinary condition, and that the fact of his death was a matter of public notoriety.

20. Then Martha, as soon as she heard Jesus was coming, went and met him; but Mary sat still in the house, *overwhelmed with grief.*

21. Then said Martha unto Jesus, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.

She expresses her faith in his power to have saved her brother from death, if he had been present; and modestly complains of his not having attended to the message which had been sent to him, while he was ill.

22. But I know that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee.

I am persuaded that if thou ask of God the restoration of my brother to life, he will grant thee this favour: but I cannot persuade myself that thou wilt think it right to ask the recovery of life for one who has been dead so many days.

23. Jesus said unto her, Thy brother shall rise again.

Christ meant immediately; but this was more than Martha could venture to hope for.

24. Martha saith unto him, I know that he shall rise again, in the resurrection at the last day.

This expectation of a resurrection she might have learnt from some of the Jewish teachers, but more probably from the discourses of Jesus.

Digitized by Google

25. Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection and the life, *or*, "*the resurrection of life*;" he that believeth on me, though he were dead, yet shall he live.

The effect is here put for the cause. Christ calls himself the resurrection of life, because he is to be the author of that resurrection to life which is to take place at the last day; just in the same manner as he calls himself the light of the world, because he gives light to it.

26. And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?

Christ is here generally understood to assert the everlasting continuance of that life which he will bestow at the last day. Others, however, suppose that by the expression *whoever liveth*, he intends those believers in him who shall be alive on the earth at the day of judgment, and that of them he means to assert that they shall never die; agreeably to what Paul says, "We shall not all die, but we shall be changed," 1. Cor. xv*. But, however this may be, it certainly was his intention, by referring Martha to future acts of power which he was to perform, to assure her that he was able to raise her brother from the dead.

27. She saith unto him, Yea, Lord, I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world.

I believe that thou art the Messiah, and therefore, every thing which thou sayest concerning thyself.

28. And when she had so said, she

* Priestley's Harmony, Note on v. twenty-four.

Digitized by Google

went her way, *by the direction of Jesus*, and called Mary her sister secretly, *for fear perhaps of giving offence to the Jews*, saying, The master is come, and calleth for thee.

29. As soon as she heard that, she arose quickly, and came unto him.

30. Now Jesus was not yet come into the town, "*into the village*," but was in that place where Martha met him.

It is supposed that he stopped here, because it was near the place of burial.

31. The Jews then which were with her in the house and comforted her, when they saw Mary that she rose up hastily and went out, followed her, saying, She goeth unto the grave to weep there.

32. Then when Mary was come where Jesus was, and saw him, she fell down at his feet, saying unto him, Lord, If thou hadst been here my brother had not died.

Modestly complaining of his absence, as Martha had done before her, while she expressed her faith in his power to heal. The scene now became too moving for Jesus to bear.

33. When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews also weeping

Digitized by Google

which came with her, he groaned in the spirit, and was troubled, *rather*, "*he was troubled in spirit and groaned.*"

34. And said, Where have ye laid him? They say unto him, Lord, come and see.

He was impatient to relieve himself and them from this distress.

35. Jesus wept.

36. Then said the Jews, Behold how he loved him.

The tears which Jesus shed, and the strong emotions which he felt on this occasion, the Jews naturally enough considered as the effect of sorrow for a departed friend; but they were in reality produced by sympathy with them and with his distressed sisters.

37. And some of them said, Could not this man, which opened the eyes of the blind, have caused that even this man should not have died?

38. Jesus therefore, again groaning in himself, cometh to the grave, "*to the tomb*;" it was a cave, and a stone lay upon it.

From a celebrated traveller, Dr. Shaw, it appears that the higher classes of people in eastern countries have tombs made for the dead, at the present day, by scooping out a cave from the solid rock, and placing the body in it, without a coffin, after it has been covered with spices; which explains what is here said about the tomb of Lazarus.

39. Jesus said, Take ye away the

Digitized by Google

stone, *in order to show that he was really dead.* Martha, the sister of him that was dead, saith unto him, Lord, by this time he stinketh: for he hath been dead four days.

As the Jews, on account of the rapid progress of putrefaction in a hot climate, used to bury their dead on the day in which they died, it is probable that Lazarus had been in the tomb four days; which, bound up as the body was with spices, would have been of itself sufficient to have taken away life, if he should not have been dead when first placed there. From attempting to restore to life a body in this state Martha endeavours to dissuade Jesus, thinking it impossible.

40. Jesus saith unto her, Said I not unto thee, that if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?

That is, the power and goodness of God, manifested in the resurrection of thy brother. He had not said this in so many words, but he had told her so in substance, when he said that her brother should rise again, and asked her whether she believed what he had told her. Many examples occur in the history of the evangelists, where miracles were performed for those who had faith in divine power, but were withholden where such a faith was wanting.

41. Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead was laid. And Jesus lift up his eyes, and said, Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me, *by assuring me that I shall be enabled to work this miracle.*

Digitized by Google

42. And I knew that thou hearest me always; but because of the people which stand by I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me.

I thank thee, O Father, that thou hast given me power to work this miracle, and herein attended to my request. I say not this, as if it were an extraordinary thing for thee to comply with my requests; but I make this public acknowledgment, that those who are present may know more certainly whence I derive my power, and by whom I am sent into the world. Although Christ was furnished with a constant power of working miracles, yet the exalted piety of such a mind as his would naturally incline him to ask it in prayer, whenever it was to be exercised; just in the same manner as every devout man will ask for daily bread, although he knows that God will give it.

43. And when he had thus spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth.

He called him with a loud voice, that all might hear, and perhaps, to give a specimen of the manner in which the dead are to be raised at the general resurrection.

44. And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with grave-clothes; and his face was bound about with a napkin.

He was thus bound, in order to apply to him the spices with which he was embalmed, the quantity of which was always proportioned to the honour in which the deceased was held*. When it is said that he came forth, it is not necessarily implied that he walked

* See Harmer, Vol. ii. p. 161, &c.

Digitized by Google

out, but only, that having raised himself up in the cave, in the side of the rock, he slid down from it on his feet, and there remained till he was set at liberty.

Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go.

REFLECTIONS.

This story, which is related with all the unaffected simplicity of truth, abounds with many instructive lessons; but I am obliged to confine myself to one or two remarks.

1. We learn from it that Christ was a man, with the same feelings as ourselves. From other parts of the evangelical history we conclude that he had the same natural appetites which men have; that he ate and drank, was hungry and thirsty like them. Here we see that he had the same mental feelings: for we find him affected as other men of the like character would be in the same circumstances. When persons of a benevolent and affectionate temper see their friends in distress, they are distressed with them: they partake of all their sorrows and regrets, as if they were their own. So does Jesus also: when he sees Mary weeping, and the Jews that accompanied her, he is deeply affected with the scene; he attempts to suppress his feelings by sighs and groans; and, when he can do it no longer, he breaks into tears; thus manifesting the sympathy of his heart and the genuine feeling of human nature: for it was not sorrow for distress which could not be remedied that occasioned these tears; since he was about to remove the cause immediately; but they were drawn forth by that tendency to weep which men feel when they see their friends weep. This behaviour is perfectly reconcileable

Digitized by Google

with the nature of a man: for it is what we observe in men every day, and what we do not deem a disgrace to the best human characters: but it appears utterly unaccountable, if we suppose Jesus to have been a great pre-existent spirit, and the maker of the world; and, if possible, still more unaccountable, if we imagine him to be the Eternal God, united to a man: for in both cases he must be infinitely superior to the weaknesses of human nature, however innocent and amiable.

2. While we have this proof that Christ was a man, we have proof, at least equally satisfactory, from this story, that he was commissioned by God to instruct mankind; for we find him addressing God as his father; thanking him for the power which he had given him to work former miracles, and to do that which he was now about to perform; and declaring, that he says this to assure those who heard him that he was his servant and messenger; and God himself bearing testimony to the truth of this declaration, by performing the miracle which he had foretold, namely, raising Lazarus from the tomb, after he had been dead four days. What stronger evidence of divine interposition could be given? What clearer testimony to the pretensions of a prophet? Is not such a miracle plainly the voice of God, saying to us, "The appeal now made to me is just; I acknowledge it to be true, and have changed the course of nature, that you might understand my opinion?"

3. From the resurrection of Lazarus from the tomb, let us look forwards with confidence to the general resurrection of all mankind. Jesus tells Martha, indeed, that he is the resurrection and the life, as a proof of his power to raise her brother to life; arguing from a greater act of power to a less. The less event, however, which is certain, may throw light upon that which is future and distant. He that is endued with power to raise a man to life who had been dead four days, may be endued with power to raise those who have been dead so many thousand

Digitized by Google

years: for where miracles are concerned, all things are equally easy or alike difficult. On a former occasion we find Christ declaring, "The hour is coming and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the son of man, and they that hear shall live;" joining the resurrection of the dead now with the future general resurrection of all mankind, as if one event was intended to be a specimen and pledge of the other; and there can be no doubt that this was the intention of the resurrection of Lazarus. To this purpose let us improve it, by keeping in mind that he who performed the one may with equal ease be qualified for the other; and by figuring to ourselves the joy and transport of that moment when the voice of the son of man will set all the prisoners of the grave at liberty together, and restore the righteous, not to an existence of a few years, to be again terminated by death, as was the case in the present instance, but to a life that will never end.

John xi. 45. to the end. xii. 1—11.

45. Then many of the Jews which came to Mary, and had seen the things which Jesus did, believed on him.

They believed not only that he was a prophet, but likewise the promised Messiah, as appears from the next chapter, verse the thirteenth, where we are told that the multitude that came to meet him, cried, Blessed is the king of Israel, that cometh in the name of the Lord: verse the seventeenth. But, satisfactory and convincing as this great miracle was to some, it seems it did not remove the incredulity of others.

46. But some of them went their ways to the Pharisees, *to such of that sect as were members of the Sanhedrim,*

Digitized by Google

and told them what things Jesus had done.

47. Then gathered, "*then assembled*," the chief priests and the Pharisees a council, *that is, the principal persons among their party*, and said, What do we; "*What must we do*;" for this man doth many miracles?

48. If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him, and the Romans shall come, "*will come*," and take away both our place, "*our temple*," and nation.

If we suffer this man to proceed, without endeavouring to stop him, all men will believe him to be the Messiah, and the king of Israel; and the Romans will be induced to destroy both our temple and nation, because we have set up a king in opposition to their authority. They do not deny his miracles, but, on the contrary, admit the reality of them, and infer thence the probability of his obtaining universal credit. Some of the council seem to have proposed forbidding Jesus to preach, as the most effectual method of stopping the progress of this heresy; in the same manner as they afterwards prohibited his apostles; and it is to this opinion, although not mentioned by the evangelist, that the next speaker refers.

49. And one of them, named Caiaphas, being the high priest that same year*, said unto them,

Some suppose the words, "being high priest that same year," to have been inserted here by mistake,

* See Lardner, Vol. i. 387, 388.

Digitized by Google

from the fifty-first verse, because they are introduced without any connection.

Ye know nothing at all,

50. Nor consider, *or, as some would render it*, "*Do ye not know and consider?*" that it is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not.

Some of the council were averse from putting Jesus to death, and thought perhaps that a reprimand would be sufficient, accompanied with an injunction not to preach any more. To this Caiaphas replies, by saying that to save the life of one in the present instance, would be to endanger the whole nation, for the reasons before suggested respecting the Romans, and that therefore he was clearly for putting him to death. Where it may be observed that the plea for such a violent measure is not founded upon guilt or demerit, but upon political expediency. The words, "it is expedient for us that one man should die for the people," are capable of a different sense from that in which they were used by Caiaphas, and applicable to the death of Christ, as the means of salvation, not to the Jewish nation only, but likewise to all mankind, who are benefitted by that event. The evangelist, therefore, seems to have considered the words of Caiaphas as prophetical, which he might be the more inclined to do, as it had been usual for God to deliver oracles by the high priest in former times*.

51. And this spake he not of himself, but, being the high priest that year, "*at that time*," he prophesied that Jesus should die, "*that Jesus would die*," for that nation;

* Lardner, Vol. i. pp. 388, 389. Theol. Rep. Vol. iii. p. 187.

Digitized by Google

52. And not for that nation only, but that also he should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad.

John thought these words of the high priest's not only applicable to his own nation, but likewise prophetical of the benefit which Christians of all nations, who are called the children of God, would derive from his death, being hereby united together under one head. To this opinion respecting the necessity of putting Jesus to death the majority of the Sanhedrim assented, and there was no further debate upon the subject.

53. Then from that day forth they took counsel together, for to put him to death.

Having resolved what to do, they now only deliberated about the best method of executing their purpose, which ended, as it should seem, in a determination to offer a reward to any person who should discover where Christ was. Being informed of this resolution, he was prevented hereby from going up to Jerusalem at present, although so near to it as to be within two miles, and retired to a distant part of the country.

54. Jesus, therefore, walked no more openly among the Jews, but went thence, into a country near the wilderness, into a city called Ephraim; and there continued with his disciples.

This he did, that he might not expose his life to danger, before the time appointed by Divine Providence for his death; an instance of prudence which we have observed in him more than once before.

Digitized by Google

55. And the Jews' passover was nigh at hand, and many went out of the country up to Jerusalem before the passover, to purify themselves.

They went thither to offer the sacrifices which the law of Moses required for such legal impurities as they had contracted; in order to prepare themselves for the festival of the passover. Some kinds of impurity required sacrifices and other rites to be performed for seven days. Those who were under a vow of Nazaritism, likewise, generally brought their vow to a conclusion at this time. Thus we find Paul joining himself, Acts xxi. 24, to a company of persons who were under this vow, and employed purifications. On these accounts there was a great influx of people into Jerusalem, for several days before the celebration of the passover.

56. Then sought they for Jesus, and spake among themselves, as they stood in the temple, What think ye; that he will not come to the feast?

Having heard the fame or seen the miracles of Jesus in the country, they were anxious to know whether he would come up to Jerusalem, where they would have an opportunity of seeing and hearing him; or whether he would not be deterred from coming, by the resolution of the council to put him to death, and the order which they had issued for his apprehension. This matter, it seems, was the subject of general conversation among those who frequented the temple.

57. Now both the chief priests and the Pharisees, *such as were members of the Sanhedrim*, had given a commandment, that if any man knew where he were, he should show it, that they might take him.

Digitized by Google

This order was probably accompanied with a threatening of some severe penalty to those who should not comply with it, and neglect to discover where he was, and with a promise of a large reward to any one who should give them information. But Jesus, although no doubt informed of the measures that were taken against him; although he well knew what the issue would be, was not deterred hereby from returning to Jerusalem, when called there to observe the passover, or by intimations of the divine will.

John xii. 1—11.

1. Then Jesus, six days before the passover, came to Bethany, where Lazarus was which had been dead, whom he had raised from the dead.

That is, on our Sunday of the week in which he suffered.

2. There they made him a supper, and Martha served.

This was a post to which her situation in life did not call her; but it was what she chose, in order to show her respect and gratitude to Jesus.

But Lazarus was one of them that sat at the table with him.

He showed to the whole company that he was restored to a sound and healthy state, by eating meat with them. This entertainment was not made at the house of Lazarus, as we might be led to suppose from this narrative, but at that of Simon the leper, as appears from the evangelist Matthew, who relates the circumstances about to be mentioned, as having happened there.

3. Then took Mary a pound of

Digitized by Google

ointment, "*of perfume*," of spikenard, *of unadulterated or liquid* spikenard*, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair; and the house was filled with the scent of the perfume.

Matthew says that Mary poured the perfume on the head of Jesus, which corresponds very well with the custom of eastern countries; but John might confine himself to the circumstances of anointing his feet and wiping them with her hair, in order to show the humility of Mary, and the warmth of her gratitude for the extraordinary favour of restoring her brother to life.

4. Then said one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, which should betray him,

Judas began to censure, but others of the disciples joined him in it.

5. Why was not this perfume sold for three hundred pence, *about nine pounds thirteen shillings and nine pence of our money*, and given to the poor?

This was intended as a censure upon Mary; intimating that she had wasted, in a useless compliment, what, if it had been sold, and the price put into the common stock, might have been of great benefit. From this passage it appears that although Christ and his disciples were maintained by the beneficence of others, yet they reserved something out of their little stock for the poor.

* See Schleusner's Lexicon, on the word πιστικης.

Digitized by Google

6. This he said, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the bag, "*kept the purse*," and bare what was put therein, *rather*, "*used to steal what was put therein.*"

This sum, if put into the purse, he thought he could, as in other instances, apply to his own private use.

7. Then said Jesus, Let her alone: against the day of my burying hath she kept this.

Grudge not the expence which she has bestowed upon me on the present occasion: for, as I am soon to die, it is no more than embalming a dead body*. He now adds another reason, founded likewise upon the short time of his continuance in the world.

8. For the poor always ye have with you; but me ye have not always.

Be not offended at the honour now paid to me: for there will not be many opportunities of repeating it, since I shall soon leave you; but you will have frequent opportunities of showing kindness to the poor.

9. Much people of the Jews, therefore, knew that he was there, and they came, not for Jesus' sake only, but that they might see Lazarus also, whom he had raised from the dead.

10. But the chief priests consulted that they might, *rather*, "*resolved that they would*," put Lazarus also to death;

* Lardner thinks that our Lord foresaw that, for want of opportunity, there would be a defect in respect to embalming him, and that he refers to this circumstance in this place. Vol. xi. p. 291.

Digitized by Google

11. Because that by reason of him many of the Jews went away, *rather*, "*withdrew*," *that is*, *from the synagogues*, and believed on Jesus.

REFLECTIONS.

In this part of the evangelical history there is something to give us pleasure, but much more to offend and give us pain.

1. We see the resurrection of Lazarus producing its proper effect upon many. From so wonderful a miracle, wrought at the instance of Jesus, they justly infer his divine mission and his claim to the character of the Messiah; they forsake the synagogues of the Jews, to hear his instructions and to become his followers. The sisters of Lazarus also express their gratitude for the restoration of their brother from the dead, in the humblest and most expensive manner which they could devise; and Jesus accepts of the honour intended him, as a proper return for his kindness. Thus we are pleased to see him honoured by the faith and gratitude of the candid and the good: but,

2. This miracle produced a very different effect upon others. Unconvinced by it themselves, they take the first opportunity of informing his principal enemies of what he had been doing, who, from the reality of the miracle, and the increasing faith which it produces, only infer the necessity of taking proper measures to stop the progress of his reputation; thus affording a dreadful example of, what we should hardly have been disposed to believe without such good proof, that some men are so fortified in prejudice, or hardened in vice, that no evidence is sufficient to pro-

Digitized by Google

duce conviction in their minds. After such an example of unbelief among the witnesses of miracles, let us not be surprised, at any which modern times have produced; nothing can be more extraordinary than this. Let us learn from it never to shut our eyes against light, by refusing to hear evidence in favour of any doctrine, however improbable it may appear: for by doing so we may be rejecting important truth.

3. Observe how private interest biasses the conduct of men, and leads them to be guilty of the greatest crimes. Of this we have an example in two striking characters which are here introduced—Caiaphas the high priest and Judas Iscariot. The one solemnly advises the putting of Jesus to death, although convicted of no crime, from a pretended regard to the safety of the nation, but really from a concern for his own and his party's popularity and influence, which he found to decline as the fame of Jesus prevailed; thus acting in the true spirit of political profligacy; professing a regard to the public interest, while he was pursuing his own private ends. Judas also acted upon the same principle, when he professed a desire to serve the poor, only that he might have an opportunity to steal; and the only difference between the two characters seems to have been this, that Judas was a villain in a private, but Caiaphas in a public station. The men were the same; and it is to be lamented that, notwithstanding the odiousness of their characters, they should have so many followers in all ages, both among statesmen and private persons.

4. Let us admire the wisdom of Providence, which takes advantage of the vices of men for accomplishing its purposes, and fulfils its designs by those very means which are employed to defeat them. Caiaphas proposed to save the temple and nation by putting Jesus to death; but that event proved the means of destroying both; thus God takes the wise in their own craftiness. In one sense, however, although not in that which Caiaphas intended, Jesus did die not for that nation only, but for all mankind, that he might unite

Digitized by Google

all the people of God under one head. Thus salvation has risen from his death, and good has sprung from evil.

John xii. 12—26.

In the last section we found many who had arrived from the country at Jerusalem inquiring with much anxiety whether Jesus would come to the feast; wishing, no doubt, to see so extraordinary a person, and, as appears from the words that follow, to show him some public testimony of their gratitude for the extraordinary miracle he had performed in raising Lazarus from the dead. For, having heard that he had arrived at Bethany, within two miles of Jerusalem, on his way thither,

12. On the next day, much people that were come to the festival, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem,

13. Took branches of palm trees, and went forth to meet him, and cried, Hosanna, Blessed is the king of Israel, that cometh in the name of the Lord.

The word Hosanna is composed of two Hebrew words, which signify *save now*, which, being contracted together, were employed as a common acclamation to express the good wishes of the persons by whom it was used for the success of any one, and are thus to be understood as applied to Christ. By calling him king of Israel, they intimate their belief that he was the Messiah; and by crying Hosanna, they express their wishes for his preservation and success in that character. The words of the multitude are borrowed, with the exception of "king of Israel," from Psalm cxviii. 25, which psalm it was usual to sing at

Digitized by Google

the passover; and this circumstance might suggest the application of them to Christ on the present occasion. Branches of palm trees it was usual to carry before princes and conquerors, in their public processions.

14. And Jesus, when he had found, *or*, "*having procured*," a young ass, sat thereon.

The other evangelists tell us that Jesus sent his disciples for the ass which he rode, but the English translation implies that he met it by chance upon the road; whereas the words in the original will admit of the latitude now used*. The evangelist John, as well as Matthew, considers this action of Jesus as the fulfilment of a prophecy of Zechariah, ix. 9, and therefore adds,

15. As it is written, Fear not daughter of Sion, *meaning Jerusalem, which was built, in part, upon a hill of that name*, behold thy king cometh, sitting upon an asses colt.

In this action of Jesus there was nothing mean or ridiculous, as some modern unbelievers have endeavoured to represent it; for this is the animal commonly used for riding in Eastern countries, being much larger than the animal of the same name in our own country. When this action took place, the disciples were not aware that it was the fulfilment of any prophecy; but when they came to understand the spiritual nature of Christ's kingdom, from his ascension into heaven, they concluded that this, among other prophecies, was applicable to him. The evangelist therefore adds,

16. These things understood not his disciples at the first; but when Jesus was glorified, then remembered they,

* Macknight, Vol. ii. p. 464, Note.

Digitized by Google

or, "*called to mind*," that these things were written of him, and that they had done these things unto him.

17. The people, therefore, that was with him when he called Lazarus out of his grave, and raised him from the dead, bare record.

This verse appears obscure in regard to its meaning, and unconnected with the rest of the narrative, in consequence of a little inaccuracy in the translation, and a slight corruption of the original text. The true reading may be thus rendered; "Now the multitude that was with him testified that he called Lazarus out of his grave, and raised him from the dead;" where the evangelist takes notice of another thing done by the multitude, besides crying Hosanna to Jesus, which it was very proper for him to notice; and that is, that they publicly declared that he had raised Lazarus from the dead, and assigned this as the reason of their acclamations and joy. This he tells us likewise was the cause of their coming to meet him.

18. For this cause the people, "*the multitude*," also met him, for that they heard that he had done this miracle.

19. The Pharisees therefore said among themselves, Perceive ye how ye prevail nothing? Behold, the whole world is gone after him.

Such of the Jews as were of the Pharisaic sect began now to be highly enraged and alarmed, to find that all the measures which they had employed to prevent the multitude from following Jesus, and from becoming his disciples, appeared to be ineffectual. From this time, therefore, they resolved to hasten the

Digitized by Google

execution of the plan which they had formed for putting him to death.

20. And there were certain Greeks among them that came up to worship at the feast, "*at the festival.*"

These Greeks, so called because they spoke the Greek language, although inhabitants of Syria, or some of the neighbouring countries of Asia, were heathens, and came to Jerusalem at this time for the sake of accompanying Jews, who assembled there from all parts, to worship at the festival of the passover. Some learned men have indeed supposed that they were a sort of half proselytes to the Jewish religion, worshipping Jehovah, but not conforming to the rites of the Mosaic law. But the behaviour of this people, and the language of Jesus on the occasion, seem to imply that they were Gentiles and idolaters *.

21. The same came therefore to Philip, who was of Bethsaida of Galilee, and desired him, saying, Sir, we would see Jesus.

They wished, it seems, to have access to a person of whose fame they had heard so much, and to have some conversation with him; but, as the Jews considered the heathens as their inferiors, and regarded intercourse with them as an act of condescension, they did not presume to speak to Jesus themselves, but desired one of his disciples to introduce them; herein imitating the modesty of the centurion, who, when he wanted the assistance of Jesus to heal his servant that was ill, did not come to him himself, but sent the elders of the Jews to make the request; adding, that neither thought he himself worthy to come unto him. The reason why these Greeks applied to Philip, rather than to any other of the apostles, was probably because, residing at Bethsaida in Galilee, near the bor-

* Lardner's Works, Vol. xi. pp. 279—282.

Digitized by Google

ders of Syria, he might have some acquaintance with them. Philip was not satisfied about the propriety of introducing them to Jesus, and therefore consults with one of his fellow disciples.

22. Philip cometh and telleth Andrew, and again Andrew and Philip told Jesus.

Jesus was pleased with the request, as it should seem, and no doubt complied with it, although that circumstance is not mentioned. This application from Gentiles suggests to Jesus the pleasing prospect of their general conversion to Christianity; an event which he foresaw to be very near.

23. And Jesus answered them, *that is, the two disciples,* saying, The hour is come that the son of man should be glorified.

That is, the time has arrived for his being honoured, by being acknowledged as the Messiah by the Gentiles, although generally rejected by his own countrymen. He next alludes to the means by which this great event was to be accomplished, namely, his death, and, as connected with his death, his resurrection, which was the grand fact that recommended the Christian religion both to Jews and Gentiles. This event and its consequences he compares to a grain of wheat, which, according to the philosophy of those times, must die in the ground before it can produce new corn. The truth is, however, that it is only the external part of the grain which decays and perishes by being put into the ground, while the internal preserves vegetative life, and even derives additional strength from the corrupt matter with which it is surrounded. This simile is used in order to reconcile his disciples to a very painful and offensive event, the death of their master. As if he had said, Be not of-

Digitized by Google

fended at my death, which is soon to take place; it is as necessary to the diffusion of my religion and my personal honour as casting seed into the ground is to the multiplication of it.

24. Verily, verily I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone, "*it abideth single*;" but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.

The satisfaction which our Lord here expresses, at the prospect of the reception of his gospel among Gentiles, may remind us of his manifesting like sentiments on occasion of the centurion's requesting him to heal his servant at a distance from him. He said to them that followed, I have not found so great faith, no not in Israel; and I say unto you that many shall come from the east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.

He had just informed his disciples that he should suffer death in the discharge of his office: he next warns them to expect no better treatment, and to prepare themselves to follow him, by making the like sacrifice.

25. He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life, in this world, shall keep it unto life eternal.

That is, alarming as the prospect of my losing my life may be, if you have a prudent regard to your best interests you will act like myself; for if, from a desire of preserving your present life, you deny your Christian profession, you will lose a much more valuable life hereafter: but if you sacrifice life at present, rather than be guilty of an act of dissimulation or treachery, in disowning me or my religion, you will be rewarded with an eternal existence hereafter. To hate life, is not to feel a real dislike to it, or to despise it, but to esteem it of less value than some other object,

Digitized by Google

to regard it as nothing, when compared to the favour of God and Christ.

26. If any man serve me, *that is, profess to serve me*, let him follow me, and where I am there shall also my servant be. If any man serve me, him will my Father honour.

If any man profess to be my disciple, let him imitate my example, and follow me, though death should lie in the way. In doing this he may lose much; but he will receive an ample recompence in being placed where I shall be, in the same regions of glory and happiness, and in being honoured by my Father.

REFLECTIONS.

1. The honours paid to Christ upon the present occasion by a great multitude of people going forth to welcome his approach, by their public procession and loud acclamations, afford a strong confirmation of our faith in the reality of his miracles, particularly of the last miracle; on account of which, more especially, these honours were bestowed. They show that these things were not done in a corner, but upon the public theatre of the world; that hundreds and thousands had been eye witnesses of the facts, or received them, upon the most satisfactory evidence, from those who had been, and that therefore we are justified in giving credit to these relations at the present day, on the authority of their testimony. These miracles produced also, upon the minds of those who professed to credit them, the effects which might be naturally expected from such extraordinary events—admiration of the author, gratitude for their possession of such important benefits, and a desire to do him honour. If there were some who did not join in paying him these honours, and whose eagerness to destroy him was only

Digitized by Google

increased hereby, it was not because they denied the facts, but because they declined drawing from them the same inferences as the multitude, who concluded that he was the Messiah, and because they were alarmed at his growing popularity and influence. So that their conduct serves rather to confirm than to weaken our faith.

2. Effects in the natural world often correspond with the method of proceeding in the moral world, and hereby serve to confirm our faith in this important truth, that they have both one author. The grain of wheat, which, after falling into the ground and appearing to die, produces a plentiful harvest, is an apt similitude to represent the happy change which took place in the world from a dying Saviour. The same image may serve likewise to afford us comfort respecting the state of his religion: it has long been buried in the ground by the great mass of corruption with which it has been loaded, and appears to be nearly dead and lost, but it still retains a latent principle of life, which will make it spring up again, like the blade of corn from the dead grain, and, under the favour of Providence produce much fruit, more perhaps than ever it produced before.

3. The sacrifices which we are required to make in the service of Christ are great; property, fame, ease, liberty and even life; but the recompences are in proportion; the reward of being honoured by God the great Father of the universe and only judge of merit; of being in the same place of glory and happiness with our master, and of enjoying an endless life, instead of that short life which we have lost. The good which we receive then infinitely overbalances the good we have lost, and furnishes us with the most powerful arguments for engaging in his service, even on the principles of prudence and self-interest. We are bound by a regard to our own happiness to adhere to such a master, and to follow him wherever he goes, or where the principles of his religion may lead us; for if we leave him we shall gain nothing by the exchange.

Digitized by Google

John xii. 27—36.

By the similitude of the grain of wheat, verse twenty-four, which, by falling into the ground and dying, produces much fruit, Jesus had alluded to his own death, and the extensive effect which it would have in procuring proselytes to Christianity. In that event, therefore, he acquiesced, on account of its glorious consequences to himself as well as to mankind; and he exhorts his disciples to submit to death in like circumstances. Nevertheless, the prospect of the excruciating pain and great ignominy which he was to endure on that occasion, filled his mind with much distress, and he cannot help expressing his apprehensions.

27. Now is my soul troubled, and what shall I say? Father save me from this hour?

He asks himself whether he should address such a request to God; for it was what his fears urged him to make; but he checks his inclination, by recollecting that the great object of his coming into the world, that is, of his having been sent with a divine commission, was to die, in order that, by rising again, he might illustrate the doctrine of a resurrection to eternal life.

But for this purpose came I unto this hour; *rather*, "*for this hour.*"

So the words ought to be rendered, in which case the latter clause must be considered as explanatory of the former. The main object of my mission was to suffer death: I shall, therefore, defeat the designs of my Father, if I am delivered from it. The only difference between his conduct on this occasion and in the garden of Gethsemane, seems to have been, that there, having death in more immediate prospect, he prayed that he might be delivered from it. "O my

Digitized by Google

Father, if it be possible let this cup pass from me;" Matt. xxvi. 39, and that here he felt a wish to offer such a prayer, but suppressed the desire as soon as it arose. Those who have believed Jesus Christ to be God inhabiting a human body, have found it very difficult to explain why Christ was so much troubled at the prospect of his death; for upon their supposition death could have no terrors. Nor is the difficulty much lessened when he is supposed to be a great preexistent spirit, the maker of the world: for death would be to him a deliverance from bondage, and the recovery of his pristine glory and dignity, and therefore an object not of terror but of joy. But allowing that Jesus was a man, and that he had the same feelings as other men, the cause of his distress is easily explained. He had a clear foresight of his death, the great object for which he was sent into the world, and of all the pain and ignominy which would attend it, from the beginning of his ministry; that is, at least twelve months before hand, and according to some three years. If the prospect of dying a violent death was painful to him, when first beheld, as it must necessarily be to one who had the feelings of a human being, every repeated view of the subject would only increase the pain, till at last, when the time of suffering came, the distress had risen to the highest pitch of anguish. But, however violent his distress was, he does not seem to think that there was any thing disgraceful in it: for he confesses it without reserve in the presence of the multitude. He probably intended something more hereby than merely giving vent to his own feelings, namely, by showing the strength of his own expectations, to prepare his disciples for an event which they were very slow to believe. He proceeds,

28. Father, glorify thy name.

Adopt the method which is best calculated to make thy being and perfections owned among thy creatures, with whatever sufferings it may be attended to myself.

Then came there a voice from hea-

Digitized by Google

ven, saying, I have both glorified it and will glorify it again.

That is, I have manifested my perfections by the miracles which have been already wrought, and I will manifest them again in a striking manner by fresh miracles, notwithstanding the apparent defeat of my plans by the death of my servant and messenger. This miraculous voice was given for the encouragement of Christ's disciples, to inspire them with the hope of further miracles, and to prevent them from sinking into despair at the death of their master.

29. The people, therefore, that stood by and heard it said that it thundered: but others said, An angel spake to him.

Some, not being near enough to hear the articulate sounds, but perceiving a considerable noise, attributed it to thunder; but others, who were nearer and heard distinct words, said that an angel spoke to him.

30. Jesus answered and said, This voice came not because of me, but for your sakes.

It came not so much to assure me that God will glorify himself by fresh miracles, as to assure you of such events.

31. Now is the judgment of this world; now shall the prince of this world be cast out.

Now will sentence of condemnation be passed upon the heathen world by the preaching of my gospel among them, and the miracles which will accompany it; now shall Satan, the supposed patron of idolatry and darkness, and the head of the heathen world, be deprived of his authority and cast out of his throne. Christ again reverts to the great success of his gospel

Digitized by Google

among the heathens, as the best subject for consoling his mind under present distress. To understand this language, it is necessary to observe that the sacred writers speak of idolaters as having renounced the authority of God, and as having placed themselves under another prince or leader, whom, as the majority of mankind were become idolaters, they call the prince of this world and the God of this world and Satan; not intending, however, by these words any real person, but an imaginary being. The kingdom of this prince, as it was established upon ignorance of God and of true religion, is called a kingdom of darkness, and the subjects of it are called enemies, strangers and aliens. As idolatry and the vices connected with it were now about to be overthrown by the preaching of the gospel, Christ might with propriety say that this prince was about to be cast out*.

32. And I, if I be lifted up, *rather,* "*when I have been lifted up,*" from the earth, will draw all men unto me.

Jesus, under the prospect of his sufferings, is still consoling himself with the good that would arise from them, even from those circumstances which were most disgraceful; from his being nailed to a cross. When I am thus exalted, says he, I shall serve as a standard, to which all men will at length resort. This effect would be produced by his crucifixion, because, being public, it would afford unquestionable evidence of his death, and consequently of his resurrection.

33. This he said signifying what death he should die; *that is, crucifixion.*

The multitude that surrounded him clearly understood that he alluded to the manner of his death by this language, as appears from the observation which they immediately make; but the evangelist, writing for the use of persons in distant countries, to whom the

* Mr. Wakefield is singular in supposing that Jesus, in this verse, speaks of himself.

Digitized by Google

phrase of lifting up was not a familiar expression, thinks proper to explain to what it referred.

34. The people answered him, We have heard out of the law, *the name which they gave to all their sacred writings*, that Christ abideth for ever;

This they inferred from those passages in the book of Psalms and Daniel, Ps. cx. 4. Daniel ii. 44. vii. 14. which speak of his being a priest for ever, and of his kingdom being an everlasting kingdom; but which by no means imply that Christ is to live for ever in this world.

And how sayest thou, The son of man must be lift up? Who is this son of man?

It seems that Christ had spoken of himself in verse thirty-two as the son of man, although that circumstance is not noticed by the evangelist. He had no where publicly declared himself to be the Messiah; but they inferred that he laid claim to that character from his permitting the multitude to call him the king of Israel, and perhaps from the great things which he says of himself here and in other places. Christ does not reply to their objection, but proceeds to exhort them to make a prudent use of the advantages they enjoyed for acquiring religious knowledge, during the short time he should remain among them; comparing himself to light, which was to shine but a short time; and his absence to a state of darkness, in which men are not able to find their way.

35. Then Jesus said unto them, Yet a little while is the light with you; walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you: for he that walk-

Digitized by Google

eth in darkness knoweth not whither he goeth.

He next directs them more particularly in what manner they were to improve the light while it lasted, and adds an additional motive for doing so.

36. While ye have the light, believe in the light, that ye may be the children of the light.

That is, believe in me, and you shall deserve the honourable name of children of light, or of those who are fond of knowledge, and willing to walk agreeably to it. Some, however, understand this as a promise of everlasting life, supposed to be represented by being children of light, a sense which is sufficiently agreeable to the language of Christ upon other occasions, who frequently promises life to those who believe in him, but which does not appear to be the meaning in this place.

These things spake Jesus, and departed, and did hide himself from them.

REFLECTIONS.

1. The conduct of Christ, in wishing that God may be glorified, that is, that the knowledge of his perfections and providence may be communicated to the world, although at the expence of his own sufferings and death, is an instance of piety and benevolence truly worthy of imitation. A mind that was prepared to submit to so much in obedience to the will of God and for his glory, could have made no ordinary attainments in religion, but must have reached the last stage of virtuous improvement, and risen to the perfection of

Digitized by Google

human character. After the same perfection let us also aspire. If called, in the course of Divine Providence, to promote the interests of truth and virtue by similar means; if required to make the most painful personal exertions, or to suffer the loss of property, of ease, of liberty and of life, let us not decline such sacrifices and exertions, where they appear to be the will of God. If our hearts begin to sink within us at the prospect of such a contest, and our friends, anxious for our welfare, would dissuade us from it, let us not be hereby deterred, but recollect the example of our master and follow it. Let us learn to say, as he did, Father, glorify thy name; employ me in whatever manner thou pleasest, to promote the honour of thy name, by active exertions or patient sufferings, as shall appear to be best. I will quietly submit to pain and shame, to poverty, imprisonment and death, if I may hereby render thy perfections known and revered by thy creatures, or promote, in any other way, the essential interests of mankind. In such a cause there is nothing which I am not prepared to do and suffer.

2. Let us not be ashamed of the cross of Christ. Our master was not, but gloried in it as the standard under which he should assemble all nations; and so should we. It was necessary to give public and unquestionable evidence of his death and of his resurrection from the dead: it is one of the most important in that series of events which constitute the history of our master: but it was the constant theme of reproach from both unbelieving Jews and Gentiles, who could not brook the idea of enlisting under a master who had died upon the cross like a malefactor. Christians themselves also soon became ashamed of it, and to cover that shame, attributed virtues to the ignominious sufferings of Christ which they never possessed; saying that they were necessary to make atonement to God for the sins of the world; representing the God of the Christians as little better than that of the heathens, who was supposed to be appeased by human sacrifices. But let us, my brethren, be satisfied with the simple doctrine of the cross of Christ: the

Digitized by Google

happy consequences which flow from it are more than sufficient to wipe away the disgrace which may seem to accompany it; for it illustrates, in a more striking manner than any other fact, the power of God and the wisdom of God.

3. The exhortation which Christ here gives to the Jews is very applicable to many of us. Yet a little while the light is with you: walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you: for with many the day is far advanced, and the night is at hand. The spring and summer of life are past, and autumn already shows its yellow leaf, a sure presage of the winter of old age. Let us make use of the light, while it lasts, by attending to the instructions of the gospel, and by building our faith and hope upon those objects which never grow old and never change. Thus shall we best prove our claim to the title of the children of light and the sons of God.

John xii. 37. to the end.

37. But though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him.

In the last section we left Jesus exhorting the Jews to believe in him without delay, and threatening them with the speedy approach of darkness, if they did not comply with his exhortation. In conformity to this threatening he retires into private, and never makes his public appearance again till the time of his apprehension and trial. His having used this language induces the evangelist, contrary to his custom, to stop the course of his narrative, to show upon what our Lord's words were founded, which was no other than the general unbelief of the Jews. This was permitted,

38. That the saying of Esaias the

Digitized by Google

prophet might be fulfilled: Lord, who hath believed our report, and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed?

This is the complaint of the prophet Isaiah in the fifty-third chapter, in which the sufferings and rejection of the Messiah are foretold with great exactness. The arm of the Lord is the power of God, because the arm in man is considered as the seat of strength; when this is spoken of as revealed or made manifest, there is an allusion to the Eastern dress, which consisted of a robe without sleeves; so that whenever the strength was exerted, the arm was uncovered; and the meaning of the question is, Who has so observed the manifestations of divine power in the miracles of Christ, as to be convinced of his being the Messiah? The evangelist does not mean to say that the prophecy of Isaiah was the cause of the unbelief of the Jews; but only that they were permitted to behave in this manner, in order that the prophecy of Isaiah might be fulfilled. The same construction is to be given to the words which follow.

39. Therefore they could not believe, because that Esaias said again,

40. He hath blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, *rather*, "*they have blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts**" that they should not see with their eyes nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them.

This is another quotation from the same prophet, vi. 9, 10. but with his language a little abridged.

* Dodson's Translation of Isaiah, chap. vi. 9, Note. Dr. Randolph on the Prophecies cited in the New Testament, No 42. Note.

Digitized by Google

Our translation attributes the blindness and hardness of heart to God as the author; but the other passages of scripture where this prophecy is quoted, as well as the Greek translators, from whom it is taken, ascribe them to the Jews themselves *.

41. These things said Esaias, when he saw his glory and spake of him.

Some copies read in this place, "When he saw the glory of God and spake of him." In this case the verse relates solely to the Supreme Being, and the evangelist must be understood to assert that when the prophet foretold the preceding circumstances, he saw the glory of God; a sense which suits extremely well with the chapter from which the prophecy is taken, in which Jehovah is described as appearing with great magnificence and splendour. If the common reading be retained, John intended to declare that these things were said by Isaiah when he saw in prophetic vision the glory of Christ, and spake of him, and then it will correspond with another passage in this gospel, in which it is said that Abraham saw Christ's day, and when he saw it was glad. Some persons, observing that the glory of Jehovah is described in the chapter of Isaiah above referred to, have strangely inferred from this verse that Christ and Jehovah must be the same persons: that is, that a mortal man, just about to die upon a cross, was the same with the creator and governor of the universe. Jesus was generally rejected by his countrymen, and where he was successful in making proselytes, it was principally among the common people; yet he had some in the higher classes of society, and even among the members of the Sanhedrim, as appears from what the evangelist next observes.

42. Nevertheless, among the chief rulers also many believed on him; but

* Matt. xiii. 14, 15. Acts xxviii. 26, 27. Pearce on these passages. Lowth on Isaiah, vi.

Digitized by Google

because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, *rather*, "*it*," lest they should be put out of the synagogue, "*be forbidden the synagogue.*"

We have already had occasion to notice, chapter ix. 22. that the Sanhedrim, alarmed at the progress of the opinion that Jesus was the Messiah, had passed such a decree: and although that opinion had been adopted by a considerable number of the members, yet, being the smaller number, and there being a great majority of Pharisees, who were inveterate enemies of Jesus, they were afraid publicly to avow their sentiments, lest the decree should be put in force against themselves. To be prohibited the synagogue, was a severe punishment, because it included in it not only exclusion from the place of public assembly, but likewise a prohibition of all familiar intercourse, which was attended with many inconveniences, as well as highly disgraceful. Such evils these senators were not prepared to encounter.

43. For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.

They preferred being held in estimation by men to being esteemed by God. When the words that follow were spoken the evangelist does not inform us; but he seems to have inserted them here, because they were peculiarly well suited to the circumstances of those who rejected Christ.

44. Jesus cried and said, He that believeth on me believeth not on me but on him that sent me.

That is, not so much on me as on him that sent me: he gives credit to the testimony which God has borne respecting his son, and hereby doth honour to him rather than to me. By thus aggrandizing the value of faith, he intended to give encouragement to those that

Digitized by Google

believed, and to show the guilt of those who rejected him.

45. And he that seeth me seeth him that sent me.

He that seeth the miracles which I perform, seeth the power of God, by whom they are in fact wrought, and from whom I have received my commission for assuming the office of a public teacher. These words were intended to increase the estimation of his miracles, and to show the guilt of those who remained unconvinced by clear proofs of the power of God. They correspond very well with his language upon another occasion, where he tells Philip, He that hath seen me hath seen the Father, John xiv. 9. and with what the writer to the Hebrews says, who calls him "the express image of his person;" Heb. i. 3. An ambassador is universally allowed to be the representative of the person whose agent he professes to be; but the relation which Christ bore to God was something nearer than this: for the miraculous powers which he exercised did not so properly belong to himself as to God.

To show the advantages of believing in him and the folly of rejecting his message, he compares himself, as he had often done before, to light.

46. I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness.

47. And if any man hear my words and believe not, I judge him not, "*I punish him not:*" for I came not to punish the world, but to save the world.

That is, my commission did not authorize me to inflict judgment upon those who rejected my doctrine, by taking away their lives; but I was authorized to enlighten and to reclaim them, and, by using these gentle methods, to rescue them from destruction.

Digitized by Google

Nevertheless, although *I* punish him not, he must not expect to escape with impunity. John iii. 17.

48. He that rejecteth me and receiveth not my words hath one that judgeth him, "*that condemneth him,*" the word that I have spoken, the same shall condemn him in the last day.

The doctrine which I have taught is so excellent, and bears such evident marks of having come from God, that to have rejected it will be found sufficient ground for condemnation at the day of judgment *.

49. For I have not spoken of myself, but the Father who sent me he gave me a commandment what I should say, *or,* "*what I should command,*" and what I should speak.

That is, as some understand the words, what miracles I should work and what doctrine I should teach. Jesus grounds the guilt of those who rejected him upon the circumstance of his having had a commission from God for saying and doing as he did.

50. And I know that his commandment is life everlasting, *obedience to it is the only means of obtaining everlasting life.* Whatsoever I speak, therefore, even as the Father said unto me, so I speak.

These last words are to be connected with the preceding verse, in which he declares that he did not assume even the office of a public teacher of himself,

* From this verse some have inferred that men are not to be tried by Christ in person, but by his gospel.

Digitized by Google

but that God gave him authority to teach: he now adds that whatever he taught he had instructions for teaching.

REFLECTIONS.

1. The conduct of these chief rulers, who believed Jesus to be the Messiah, but were afraid to acknowledge their faith publicly, affords a striking example of the fatal effects of the love of praise, where it becomes the leading object of men's attention. From this motive they refused Christianity the benefit of their testimony in its favour; the testimony, no doubt, of some of the ablest, wisest and most impartial men in that learned body, which would probably have drawn after it the faith of many more in that assembly, and certainly would have had much weight with the common people. By practising concealment and disguise themselves, they sanctioned the like conduct in others, and hereby did unspeakable injury to the interests of truth: yet these men valued themselves for their sagacity in discovering the truth, and for their prudence in avoiding those evils which were connected with the profession of it. Although Christians at heart, they enjoyed the reputation of being Jews, were admitted to the company of the great, and partook of all the pleasures which agreeable and refined society could afford; while they saw those honest but weak men who had the folly and rashness to avow their faith in Christ, prohibited the synagogue, excluded from the company of the rich and learned, and exposed to every kind of mortification and insult. But mark the consequences of their prudence; to secure a little temporary honour, they lost the truly valuable and lasting honour of being steady confessors of the truth in a corrupt age, their names being buried in silence, while those of two of their colleagues, who had the resolution and virtue to do what they declined, Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, are handed down with honour

Digitized by Google

to the latest generations. By courting the favour of men, they lost, what was of far greater value, the favour of Christ and of God; by concealing the truth, they lost all the advantage arising from the knowledge of it: for such prudent and timid believers shall not be ranked with the disciples of Christ, but shall be punished with those who rejected his pretensions altogether. Of those who are thus ashamed of him before men, he will be ashamed before his Father in heaven. If we, my brethren, wish to avoid a like fate, let us beware of imitating the conduct of these time-serving and interested rulers: let us learn to make an open and unreserved profession of the truth, on every subject, without regard to the consequences, whether it relate to the divine authority, to the person or the doctrine of Christ: regarding this profession as a sacred duty, required from us both by God and Christ, and necessary to the welfare of mankind. For truth is the proper food of virtue, and as requisite to its nourishment and perfection as bread is to the support of the animal body, and those can have little regard to the happiness of their brethren, who withhold from them this necessary provision, or suffer them to feed upon what is noxious and unwholesome, or destitute of proper nutriment.

2. Let us learn to respect the authority of Christ. On all subjects to which his commission extended it is the same with that of God: for he teaches nothing but what God authorizes. If his maxims should, therefore, differ ever so much from those adopted by men of the world, or from the rules laid down by philosophers of ancient or modern times, let us bow to his decisions, which are those of infallible truth. If his commandments are ever so hard to be obeyed, let us chearfully submit to them, knowing that he is commissioned to reward our obedience with life everlasting, and to punish our refusal with unspeakable misery. As the words of his gospel are to be the rule by which we are to be tried hereafter, let us make it the rule of our conduct now.

Digitized by Google

John xiii. 1—17.

In the preceding chapter we found Jesus confessing that he was troubled at the prospect of a violent death, and almost ready to pray that he might be delivered from it; and the subsequent history will afford us further proof of the same painful apprehensions; but this was no more than a transient and momentary feeling. The general state of his mind was a settled composure and calm tranquillity, which left him in full possession of his faculties, and enabled him to attend with his wonted benevolence to the instruction and consolation of those about him. Of the justice of this observation the transaction related in the beginning of this chapter affords a striking proof, and many other examples of it will occur from this time to the period of his death.

The three first verses of the chapter are to be regarded as a general introduction to the incidents and discourses which follow, and were intended to explain the language and conduct of Jesus in making such constant reference to his death and departure from the world.

1. Now Jesus having known before the festival of the passover that his hour was come, when he was to go out of the world, and having loved his own who were with him in the world, he showed his love to them to the last.

Of this the evangelist proceeds to give several examples. In this verse I have followed the rendering of Bishop Pearce principally, which is more correct and intelligible than the common.

2. And supper time being come,

Digitized by Google

for this is the most approved reading, and the succeeding transactions show that supper was not begun, the devil having already entered the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, that he might betray him,

By saying that the devil had entered into the heart of Judas, the evangelist only means to say that he had formed the dark design of delivering up his master; attributing that to the devil which was in reality the act of his own mind, and speaking, agreeably to the prevailing language of the Jews, of the devil as the author of moral as well as natural evil. But the truth is that neither one nor the other proceeds from him, and that he has no other existence than in the language or imaginations of the inhabitants of eastern countries. For the clear language of scripture in other places is that the evils of life, as well as its pleasures, proceed from the hand of God, and that the vices of men are to be attributed to themselves. It was proper to mention here the knowledge which Jesus had of the designs of Judas, in order to account for the expectation which he discovers of his sufferings, and the method which he takes to prepare himself and his disciples for them.

3. Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands,

That is, that the Father had subjected the heathen world as well as the Jewish, to his authority. In scripture language Jews and Gentiles constitute the whole creation, and that is spoken of in this passage as done, which it was in the divine purpose to do; a mode of speaking which is very common in the New Testament. To this extension of his authority over the heathen world he refers in the last chapter, xii. 23, 24. when visited by the Greeks *.

* Or perhaps the words may only mean that all things relating to the Christian dispensation were placed under his direction. John iii. 35.

Digitized by Google

And that he was come from God, and was going away to God,

That is, that as he had received his commission from God, so he was going to him, to receive the reward of his fidelity in the execution of it. On this clause some have observed, that as going to God in the latter part signifies a local ascent, so in the former, coming from God must signify a local descent, and therefore implies the pre-existence of Christ. But both parts are very well connected together in the manner just explained, without having recourse to the supposition of Christ having been in a pre-existent state, which ought not to be admitted but upon the clearest evidence. The evangelist now proceeds to his narrative.

4. He riseth from supper, *that is, from the supper-table, for the meal was not yet begun*, and laid aside his garments, *his upper garment*, and took a towel and girded himself;

5. After that he poureth water into a bason; and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded.

To wash their feet just before they began their meals, was a practice which an attention to cleanliness necessarily suggested to men in eastern countries, where the feet, being in a great measure uncovered, were very liable to be soiled. This office was usually performed for the guests by a slave, or by the meanest servant in the household. When David offered to take Abigail to be his wife, she expresses how unworthy she thought herself of this high honour by saying, Let thine handmaid be a servant, to wash the feet of the servants of my Lord: 1 Sam. xxv. 41. This office Jesus thought proper to perform for the

Digitized by Google

disciples himself, before the celebration of the passover, for reasons which he afterwards explains.

The other disciples were no doubt surprised and shocked at seeing their master perform this mean office; but Peter, more forward to speak than the rest, ventures to remonstrate with him upon the impropriety of what he was doing.

6. Then cometh he to Simon Peter, and Peter saith unto him, Master, dost thou wash my feet?

7. Jesus answered and said unto him, What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter.

That is, when I have done. Accordingly we find that when he had finished, he explains to Peter and the rest of them the meaning of this action. Peter, however, paid no regard to this promise of an explanation, but perseveres in his opposition, for it is added,

8. Peter saith unto him, Thou shalt never wash my feet. Jesus answered him, If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me.

By washing, in this place, Christ seems to intend the moral effect of his doctrine, which if Peter had not experienced, he did not deserve to be called his disciple: for it does not seem likely that he would make submission to this ceremony a necessary condition of enjoying the privileges of the gospel.

9. Simon Peter saith unto him, Master, not my feet only but also my hands and my head.

If washing is intended to express the moral influence of thy doctrine, let my whole person be washed, and not a part only; to intimate that I am completely

Digitized by Google

purified. To this Jesus replies by saying that as he who was habitually clean, by bathing every day, according to the custom of eastern countries, did not want to be washed in every part, but only in his feet, which necessarily contract soil and dust by daily use; so Peter and his companions had no occasion to be purified in their whole characters, being already virtuous, but only from occasional infirmities.

10. Jesus saith to him, He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit, "*all over*," and ye are clean, but not all.

He excepts Judas from the description of being generally clean, because his whole character was defiled with vice.

11. For he knew who should betray him; therefore said he, Ye are not all clean.

12. So after he had washed their feet, and had taken his garment, and was set down again, he said unto them; Know ye what I have done unto you?

He now enters into that explanation of the action which he had been performing, which he had promised to Peter, verse seven.

13. Ye call me Master and Lord, and ye say well: for so I am.

Christ, although a man as well as the apostles, yet claimed a great superiority over them, on account of his superior miraculous endowments and his being sent of God, while they were only sent by him.

Digitized by Google

14. If I then, your Lord and master, have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash one another's feet.

15. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you.

As I, who am so much superior to you, performed the mean office of washing your feet before supper, do you perform the like mean offices, whenever you have an opportunity of serving another. Jesus thought it necessary to give them this instruction at this time, because they were soon to be endowed with miraculous powers, which might fill them with a high conceit of their own consequence, and tempt them to think that they were exempted hereby from servile offices of kindness; for this they could have no plea, after such an example of condescension from their master.

16. Verily, verily I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his Lord, neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him.

There seems to be here an allusion to the future situation of the apostles, who were to be sent by Christ into the world, in the same manner as he had been sent by the Father; which was a mark of their subjection, and therefore an argument against pride.

17. If ye know these things, *that is*, "*know them to be true*," happy are ye if ye do them.

These words seem to be a reply to a tacit objection made by his disciples to what he was saying. They are supposed to say, that the master is greater than the servant, and he who sends than the person sent, is a

Digitized by Google

common proverb, which we all admit to be just, and which there is no occasion to repeat. To this he answers, If ye know it, happy are ye if ye act agreeably to it.

REFLECTIONS.

1. Let us learn to admire and endeavour to imitate the calm fortitude of Jesus, who, on the night preceding his crucifixion, and a few hours only before his death, could so far forget his own sufferings, of which, however, he had a clear foresight, as to be attentive to the slightest wants of those around him, and to employ himself in devising means for their instruction. This was not the effect of natural courage or stoical apathy; for at times he felt painful apprehensions; nor was it the effort of a frantic enthusiasm, which has enabled some persons to despise pain; for all his actions bear the marks of sober reason and a sound judgment; but this admirable fortitude and composure were the joint effects of faith and piety; of a reliance on the divine promise, which assured him that his death should be followed by a glorious resurrection, and of a humble resignation to the divine will, which visited him with evil in order to accomplish its benevolent purposes respecting mankind. These stifled the feelings of nature at the prospect of a most painful event, and produced a ready and chearful acquiescence. If you wish to acquire the like fortitude, strive to excel in the same virtues, which will afford as effectual a security to you against the fear of death as they did to Jesus.

2. Let all men who call themselves the disciples of Jesus, learn to practise that truly Christian lesson which his action in washing his disciples' feet was intended to teach. However elevated their situation in the world may be, let them endeavour to do good to those below them in every way in their power, how-

Digitized by Google

ever mean the offices which they are called to perform. Let those who are old, and think themselves entitled to respect on account of their years, not deem it beneath them to attend to the wants and to labour for the benefit of children and young persons, but give them seasonable counsels, and such other assistance as their situation may require. Let the rich not disdain the company of the poor, nor decline associating with them, when necessary for their instruction or consolation; nor refuse them such friendly offices as their hands alone may be qualified to perform. Let men of rank, or such as are invested with high authority, be attentive to the wants and wishes of ordinary persons. Let men of knowledge and learning not despise those of their brethren who have not been able to make the like acquirements, but be ready to communicate their superior knowledge to the ignorant; and, for this purpose, study to adapt their instructions to the capacities and weaknesses of those whom they teach. And if any should ask why they stoop so low in performing these services, let them reply that it is an honour to do good, although to the meanest object and in the humblest form, and that they have been taught to think so both by the example and doctrine of their master.

John xiii. 18—30.

When Jesus was washing the feet of Peter, he had told him that they were clean, but not all. He now explains the reason of his making that exception: it was that he was well acquainted with the characters of his apostles, and knew that one of them had already determined to act the part of a traitor.

18. I speak not of you all: I know whom I have chosen; but that the scripture might be fulfilled; He that

Digitized by Google

eateth bread with me hath now lift up his heel against me.

That is, agreeably to the language of scripture, he that hath eaten at my table has acted the same ungrateful part towards me, as the brute which kicks at the master by whom he is fed. By the phrase, that the scripture might be fulfilled, no more seems to be here intended than that the words quoted from Psalm xli. 10. were applicable to the present case, and not that they were designed as a prophecy. The word *now*, with which the nineteenth verse begins in the common translation, belongs to the eighteenth, and I have accordingly introduced it there.

19. I tell you before it come, that when it is come to pass ye may believe that I am he.

I have foretold this act of treachery, that when it shall take place you may be confirmed in your belief that I am the Messiah. Such foresight was a proof of divine inspiration, and therefore of his being intitled to the character which he assumed. To communicate this foreknowledge to his disciples, was also a proof of his attention to their interests. He now adds another proof of his affection, namely, that he should regard the attention paid to them as paid to himself; just in the same manner as what was paid to himself was in reality paid to God.

20. Verily, verily I say unto you, He that receiveth whomsoever I send, receiveth me; and he that receiveth me, receiveth him that sent me.

21. When Jesus had thus said, he was troubled in spirit, "*he was inwardly troubled*," and declared, saying, Verily, verily I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me.

Digitized by Google

This declaration was probably accompanied with a deep sigh, expressive of the pain which he felt at so base an act of ingratitude, which induced the evangelist to observe that he was troubled in spirit, or inwardly troubled.

22. Then the disciples looked one on another, doubting of whom he spake.

They watched to observe whether any one discovered marks of guilt in his countenance. The traitor, however, manifested no signs of shame or embarrassment.

23. Now the disciple whom Jesus loved lay at the breast of Jesus.

In order to understand this, it is necessary to observe that the method of sitting at meals among the ancients was different from ours, as they placed themselves in a half recumbent posture, two or three upon the same couch; so that the head of one guest was opposite to the breast of another above him. In this position was the apostle John in respect to his master; the disciple whom Jesus loved more than the rest, or the favourite disciple; for it is in this modest manner that the evangelist describes himself.

24. Simon Peter, therefore, beckoned to him, that he should ask who it should be of whom he spake.

On this liberty he thought the favourite disciple might presume, although he was afraid to take it himself.

25. He then, lying on Jesus' breast, *rather*, "*leaning back his head on Jesus' breast*," *in order to whisper in his ear*, saith unto him, Lord, who is it?

26. Jesus answered, He it is to whom I shall give a sop, "*a piece of*

Digitized by Google

bread," when I have dipped it: and when he had dipped the piece he gave it to Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon.

The circumstances related in this and the two preceding verses seem to have been a private transaction between Jesus and these two apostles: for the rest of them do not seem to have understood the meaning of what was done.

27. And after the sop Satan entered into him.

That is, he resolved to execute the dark plan which he had before laid for betraying his master. To suppose that the devil actually enters the minds or the bodies of men, in order to direct their thoughts and actions to some wicked purpose, is to take away criminality from human actions, and to destroy the moral responsibility of man; and is too gross an idea to be admitted for a moment. The truth is that the devil has no real existence in nature, but is an imaginary being, whose attributes are borrowed by the Jews from the mythology of the east, the supposed patron of evil and instigator of all crimes, to whom the sacred writers of later times ascribe all opposition to the gospel and all natural as well as moral evil. Their doing so, however, ought not to lead us into the idea of his being a real being, producing such effects; for on other occasions, and when they speak plainly, they ascribe all natural evil to God and all moral evil to man.

Jesus, knowing the resolution of Judas to betray him, desires that he will execute it as soon as possible, in order to free him from the pain which he felt from the apprehension of sufferings, and which was prolonged by every delay.

Then said Jesus unto him, What thou doest do quickly.

28. Now no man at the table knew

Digitized by Google

for what intent, "*for what*," he spake this unto him.

The apostle John, who asked Jesus who was the traitor, and saw him give the piece of bread to Judas for the express purpose of pointing out the man, must, I conceive, be excepted from this general declaration: for he would naturally understand Jesus to refer to the design of betraying him, when he said, That thou doest do quickly. But the other apostles, not having heard the question nor the answer to it, which were both delivered in a whisper or low voice, were at a loss to know of what he spoke.

29. For some of them thought, because Judas had the bag, "*the purse*," that Jesus had said unto him, Buy those things that we have need of against the festival, *or, rather*, "*for the festival*," *for it was already begun*; or that he should give something to the poor.

30. He then, having received the sop, went immediately out: and it was night.

Judas, finding that his design was discovered, and being ashamed to remain any longer with Jesus and his fellow disciples, resolved to execute his purpose immediately, and therefore went out. The circumstance of its being night is noticed, in order to show how near it was to the time of the death of Jesus, and to account for the discourses which he held with them in reference to that subject.

The account given of this transaction respecting Judas in some of the other evangelists, is somewhat different from that given here; but as John bore so important a part in the transactions himself, his account is most likely to be exact.

Digitized by Google

REFLECTIONS.

1. We see Jesus justly appealing to his prediction of the treachery of Judas, as a proof of his being the Messiah, and resting the justice of his claim to that character upon the event; a conduct wholly inconsistent with that of an impostor. Had this been indeed the only time in which he had given proofs of knowledge of the treachery of Judas, as the infamous bargain was already made with the high priest, and an opportunity only wanted for executing it, we might conceive it possible that he should acquire this knowledge by natural means, some concealed friend disclosing the secret to him, in order to preserve his life; but when we find that the evangelist declares that he gave proofs of his possessing this knowledge long before Judas had discovered his intentions, observing, on one occasion, that he knew from the beginning who it was that believed not and who should betray him; and, on another, saying to them, Have I not chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil? that is, a false accuser; such knowledge as this of the secret intentions of the human heart we are sure can proceed from God only; and it clearly proves a supernatural intercourse between Jesus and his heavenly Father. It is therefore justly appealed to as an evidence of his divine mission in the character which he assumed as the Messiah; and in this view it deserves to be seriously reflected upon by us for the confirmation of our faith.

2. The account here given of Judas Iscariot exhibits a shocking picture of ingratitude and treachery. He that eateth bread with me has lift up his heel against me; he whom I had chosen as my companion, whom I had fed at my table, whom I had treated as my confidential friend and instructed as my child,

Digitized by Google

has betrayed me; taken advantage of the confidence which I had placed in him, to put me in the hands of my enemies. This he has done not to save his own life by sacrificing that of his friend, which might have afforded some apology for his conduct, on the ground of human infirmity; not for the sake of honour, which affords some excuse for men when they do wrong; not to save his country by delivering up an impostor, which would have been a laudable act; but he has done it for the sake of money, and therefore for mercenary motives. What base ingratitude! What complicated villainy! So it is we exclaim. But observe,

3. With what calm dignity Jesus bears the treachery of his apostle. We might have expected that he would have indulged himself in bitter reproaches, and have uttered the strongest expressions of rage at such unjust treatment. For thus men of ordinary character would have acted: but Jesus beheld it with a composed and unruffled mind, only hinting at his ingratitude by a quotation from the Psalms, and saying, What thou doest do quickly.

4. The conduct of Jesus in reserving a part of his small store for the use of the poor, is well worthy the imitation of his followers. That store was supplied not from his own property, for he had none, but from the contributions of his friends, who ministered to him of their substance; and it contained little more than was necessary for daily subsistence. In such circumstances others would have deemed themselves excused from acts of liberality to the poor; but even here Jesus deducts something, to relieve the wants of the necessitous. Let all his disciples learn to do as he has done, and while the rich give liberally, in proportion to their abundance, let not those of meaner condition think themselves excused.

Digitized by Google

John xiii. 31. to the end.

Jesus having pointed out Judas as the person among the apostles who was to betray him, he immediately left the company, and went to the high priest to procure a band of soldiers to apprehend his master. During the interval between his leaving Jesus and returning, some very interesting conversation took place between Jesus and his disciples, which has been carefully recorded by John, although omitted by the other evangelists, and of which he now proceeds to give an account.

31. Therefore when he was gone out, Jesus said, Now is the son of man glorified, and God is glorified in him.

That is, grievous and dishonourable as you will esteem my death to be, it will be accompanied or followed with circumstances which will confer upon me the highest honour, as well as display in a striking manner the perfections of God. In this language Jesus alludes to his resurrection and ascension, and he speaks of himself as having already attained this honour, although it was still future, because it was rendered certain by the errand on which Judas was just gone. He is still endeavouring to reconcile his own mind, as well as the minds of his disciples, to the painful event which was approaching; and therefore represents it as a source of honour rather than a cause of disgrace. That by "glorified," he refers to his ascension, is rendered probable from what John says, vii. 39. where, assigning the reason why the Holy Ghost, or miraculous powers, was not yet bestowed, he says, it was because Jesus was not yet glorified.

32. If God be glorified in him, God shall also glorify him in himself, *or*,

Digitized by Google

"*with himself*," and shall strait-way glorify him.

Since God will derive honour from the sufferings and death of his Son, he will take care to reward him for it, by taking him out of the world to spend an endless life with himself, and will do this without delay. Some refer the words, "in himself," to Christ, and suppose some honour to be spoken of which would be peculiarly his own, arising from his exemplary behaviour under his sufferings, and in opposition to miraculous performances, which were, properly speaking, the works of God; but the above interpretation seems to me most natural*. This language contained intimations that he should be removed from them; but the disciples, probably, did not understand it; he therefore speaks more plainly.

33. Little children, yet a little while I am with you; *I shall be very soon removed from you*; Ye shall seek me, and, as I said unto the Jews, Whither I go ye cannot come, so now I say unto you.

You will hereafter wish for my company, but then you will find it impossible to enjoy it; for I shall be removed to a place which you cannot approach. I therefore warn you, as I before warned the Jews, to take advantage of it while it is in your power, that you may leave as little room as possible for useless regret.

34. A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you that ye also love one another.

The last part of the sentence seems intended to explain the former; to love one another, is to do so in

* Wakefield on this passage.

Digitized by Google

the degree in which Christ had loved them, namely, by laying down his life for their benefit. In this consisted the novelty of the commandment; for it could not be supposed but that Jews, who lived together and followed the same master, would love one another to a certain degree; but that they should possess so much disinterested benevolence as was necessary for this purpose, required that they should believe in the same principles, and be animated by the same hopes, as their master. This new command was not so much intended for the twelve apostles as for all Christians, requiring them to love one another with the most cordial affection, of whatever nation they might be, and however distinguished by rites and ceremonies, whether Jews or Gentiles.

35. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.

Benevolence is so distinguished a part of my character, that you will be known to be my disciples by resembling me in this instance. The disciples of the different doctors of the law among the Jews were known by their different methods of interpreting particular parts of the law of Moses, according to the sentiments of their respective masters: the disciples of the Pharisees, by their dress and their attention to ceremonies: those of John the Baptist, by the austerity of their manners: but that which would distinguish Christians was mutual benevolence.

Peter, having heard Jesus intimate that he was about to leave them, and that something would prevent their following him, desires to know whither he is going, thinking in his own mind that no obstacle should prevent him from following his master.

36. Simon Peter said unto him, Lord, whither goest thou? Jesus answered him, Whither I go thou canst

Digitized by Google

not follow me now: but thou wilt follow me afterwards.

By this answer to the question of Peter, Jesus secretly intimates that he had not courage to follow him at present, by exposing himself to death, but that he should acquire courage sufficient hereafter. Peter, however, did not understand this hint, or could not persuade himself that it was well founded.

37. Peter said unto him, Lord, why cannot I follow thee now? I will lay down my life for thy sake.

So he imagined himself willing to do; but Jesus was better acquainted with his timidity and want of courage.

38. Jesus answered him, Wilt thou lay down thy life for my sake? Verily, verily I say unto thee, The cock shall not crow till thou hast denied me thrice.

This is usually understood of the crowing of a fowl: but another interpretation has been suggested, which is much more probable. Jerusalem was a military station, and a guard of Roman soldiers kept watch during the whole night, but was relieved every three hours; at nine o'clock at night, at twelve, at three in the morning and at six. At each of these watches a trumpet was sounded, and that which was sounded at three o'clock in the morning, when the cock usually begins to crow, was called the cock-crowing, and that which was sounded at six in the morning, the second cock. When Christ, therefore, foretold that before the cock crew Peter should have thrice denied him, he meant to say that before three o'clock that morning he should be three times guilty of that crime. Considered in this light, it must be regarded as a very

Digitized by Google

remarkable prophecy, the fulfilment of which must greatly strengthen the faith of Peter and the other apostles *.

REFLECTIONS.

1. Let Christians ever keep in mind this new commandment of their dying master, to love one another as he has loved them; and let them endeavour to comply with it. For this purpose let them recollect what the conduct of Jesus has been towards his disciples: his love to them did not consist merely in an internal affection or in words; in calling them by affectionate names, *his brethren*, *his friends* and *his little children*; but was manifested by substantial acts of beneficence, by his undertaking the dangerous office of teaching a new religion for the benefit of mankind, by his instructing his disciples with indefatigable industry, and by persevering in his work in the midst of much opposition and the greatest discouragements, not only with the hazard of his life, but with the prospect before him of certain death, and that in the most painful and ignominious form. Such was the love of Jesus towards his disciples, and then only are we worthy of being called his disciples, when we are prepared to perform the like services, and are ready to make the same sacrifices, for the good of our brethren. As the circumstances of Christians vary with different ages of the world, or with their condition in it in the same age, we may not be called to exactly the same duties. Sometimes men need to be instructed in truths which they are averse from receiving; sometimes to be confirmed in those which they have already embraced. Sometimes the wants of the body are most urgent; at other times, those of the mind. The ability to do good likewise varies according to the natural or ac-

* See Theological Repository, Vol. vi. p. 104, &c.

Digitized by Google

quired endowments of men, and the portion of worldly good with which they are furnished; so that some are able to do more and others less: but whatever be the talents with which the disciple of Jesus is furnished, he will zealously exert them in doing good to his brethren, according to his own ability and their wants; whether the naked are to be clothed, or the hungry to be fed; whether those at variance are to be reconciled, the sick and pained to be assisted and accommodated, or the afflicted to be comforted. He who refuses to do good in any of these ways, and confines his regards wholly to himself, is not a disciple of Christ; he is destitute of one quality which is essential to that character—Christian benevolence.

2. Judging by this rule, how great a proportion, alas, of the professed disciples of Jesus will be unchristianized! How many are there who attend Christian ordinances, who bear the Christian name, who yet manifest nothing of the spirit of Christ; who are so far from loving the genuine disciples of Jesus, that they hate and injure them; who not only decline to give them assistance, when in want or distress, but refuse to comply with their legal claims. But let such men know that, however they may assume the honourable name of Christians, they do not belong to the body. The great founder of our religion disowns any relation to them; they are of another family, and belong to another master.

3. Let the confidence of Peter teach us to distrust our best formed resolutions. This confidence led him to make the rash declaration which is here recorded, and afterwards to smite with the sword one of those who came to apprehend his master, and to attend him to the palace of the high priest, where the fear of being himself apprehended and put to death caused him to be guilty of the crime which Jesus had foretold. A prudent distrust of himself would have kept him from all these situations, and saved him from the consequent disgrace and remorse. From his fall let us learn that our truest wisdom lies in caution, in avoiding danger,

Digitized by Google

rather than in exposing ourselves to it. While we pray, Lord keep us from temptation, it becomes us to be careful that we do not rashly run into danger.

John xiv. 1—14.

Our Lord having informed his disciples, in the preceding chapter, that he should soon be removed from them, their minds were oppressed with dejection at the prospect, although they did not probably understand him to speak of his death. To alleviate their sorrow, he suggests various topics of consolation to them, in this and the following chapters to the end of the seventeenth.

1. Let not your heart be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me.

The design of these words is to exhort them to rely upon the power of God and the fidelity of Jesus, for the fulfilment of the promise which he is going to make in the following words.

2. In my Father's house are many mansions.

The idea which the scriptures give us of heaven is sometimes that of a house, and sometimes that of a city above the sky, in which God resides, and where he is surrounded, like a great prince, by the ministers of his court. It is the former of these images that Christ here uses: for he supposes God to occupy a palace, and assures his disciples that there are various apartments in it, and therefore places for them as well as himself. Although persuaded that their master, when he departed from the world, would go to God, a consciousness of their own inferiority to him might lead them to doubt whether they should follow him to the same place; but if there are various habitations, suited to the different degrees of proficiency which men have

Digitized by Google

made in goodness, as they are here taught to believe, the sincere but imperfect follower of Jesus would have ground for hope, and those who had distinguished themselves by their services might look for a distinguished place.

Behold, I tell you I am going to prepare a place for you, *for such I conceive to be the true reading of the passage, being supported by an ancient version*, and the connection of the words: not, as we have it,* "If it were not so I would have told you."

This was an important promise, to which, after his usual manner, he calls their attention, "Behold, I tell you"; and his intention is to assure his disciples that they need not mourn for his absence: for as, in a company of travellers, some one went before to the lodging-place, to prepare it for their reception, so he was going before them, to prepare for their use those mansions of which he had been speaking. In what this preparation will consist he has not told us, and therefore any thing we can suggest must be mere conjecture.

3. And, when I have been and prepared a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself, that where I am there ye may be also.

Christ here refers to the general resurrection of the dead, and informs his disciples, who were dejected at the prospect of his departure from them, that at some future period he should return, to put them in possession of those mansions which he was now going to prepare, by which means they would be placed near

* See Wakefield's Note.

Digitized by Google

himself. Nothing could be better adapted to reconcile their minds to a painful separation than an assurance of this kind, that a separation was necessary to accomplish some design for their benefit, and that when this work was finished they should meet again, and remain together for ever.

Having spoken so often to his disciples of a future life, and said so much about the means necessary to secure it, he had good reason to conclude that when he talked of leaving the world they must know whither he was going, and how they might be able to follow him; yet we find that his disciples did not understand him.

4. And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know.

5. Thomas saith unto him, Master, we know not whither thou goest, and how can we know the way?

The apostles had so little expectation of their master's death at this time, that they never referred what he said about his departure from them to that event; but seem to have thought that he was speaking of retreating to some unknown place in Judæa, in order to avoid his enemies. This is the reason of the reply made by Thomas, that they did not know the way. Jesus assures him that he himself was the way.

6. Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth and the life:

That is, I am the true way unto eternal life. Jesus often says that of himself which is only true of his doctrine; thus he calls himself a door and a vine, meaning that his doctrine answered purposes correspondent to the uses and qualities of these objects. So when he says of himself that he is the true way to eternal life, he means that his doctrine is so.

No man cometh to the Father but by me.

Digitized by Google

No one can find the way to the presence of God, my Father, in heaven, and to those mansions of which I have been speaking, but by my doctrine. Christ cannot mean to exclude all but believers in his gospel from the possession of eternal life: for the patriarchs and the disciples of Moses, by conforming to that institution of religion under which they lived, no doubt found their way thither, but in a less perfect manner. Christ teaches us the best way, and there is no other who has any claim to this prerogative. Our coming to God may perhaps mean here knowing him, and Jesus may have intended to assert that he alone can communicate the true knowledge of the Father. This sense seems to be rendered probable by the observation which follows in the next verse.

7. If ye had known me ye would have known my Father also.

If you had attended to the doctrine which I have taught, and to the miracles which I have wrought, you would have seen sufficient manifestations of the power and wisdom of God, to enable you to know him.

And from hence forth ye know him, and have seen him.

Notwithstanding what I have just said, which seems to imply that you are ignorant of God, yet, in consequence of what you have been witnesses to in my ministry, you do actually know him, and may be said to have seen him.

8. Philip saith unto him, Master, show us the Father and it sufficeth us.

The words of Philip imply that they had not yet seen God in their master, in the way which he had suggested: for he requests to be indulged with such a favour, and declares that if it be granted he should be satisfied. To this request Jesus replies with some warmth.

Digitized by Google

9. Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? He that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Show us the Father?

10. Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me.

Believest thou not that I am acquainted with the divine purposes and counsels respecting the salvation of mankind; and that the power of God resides in me?

The words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself; but the Father that dwelleth in me he doeth the works.

The doctrine which I teach is not the suggestion of my own mind, but communicated to me by the Father, with whom I have the most intimate intercourse. This was intended to explain what he meant by saying, "I am in the Father." The miracles which I perform are not so much mine as the Father's, whose power resides in me, and is exerted, under my direction, whenever I please. This explains the words, "The Father is in me."

11. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father in me, or else, believe me for the very works' sake.

Believe me on my own authority, when I assure you of the intimate union subsisting between me and the Father, in the way which I have just explained; or else believe me on the authority of my miracles, which are

Digitized by Google

sufficient to prove that I am a divinely commissioned teacher, and that the power of God resides in me.

Having mentioned his own miracles, Jesus is hereby reminded of those miraculous powers which his apostles should possess, and directs their thoughts to this subject, as a proper ground of consolation upon the present occasion, because it was an advantage which they would derive from his personal absence.

12. Verily, verily I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also, *he shall work the same kind of miracles as I work*; and greater works than these shall he do, because I go to my Father.

Having finished the work which God gave me to do, and suffered death in doing it, I shall be taken up to God, and shall receive from him, as a reward of my sufferings and obedience, authority to bestow more extraordinary powers than I was ever able to confer while I continued with you. Christ is usually supposed to refer to the gift of tongues, which the apostles themselves possessed and could communicate to others *.

13. And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name that will I do;

Whatever miraculous gifts you shall ask the Father as my disciples, these I will confer upon you. They had before asked for blessings in the name of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, or as the descendents of these patriarchs, to whom great favours had been promised; but now they are to ask as the disciples of Christ, to whom a promise of such powers had been given.

"I will do it," says Christ. Miraculous powers came from Christ. During the apostolic age, a particu-

* Dr. Priestley thinks that Christ refers to the greater number of miracles which the apostles should work, and the greater number of their converts. See his Harmony.

Digitized by Google

lar intercourse subsisted between Christ and his apostles, which consisted in his enabling them to work miracles, and frequently appearing to them. It was to these he referred, when he said, Lo, I am with you always to the end of the age. This intercourse is now suspended, at least it is no longer sensible; but even while it continued, observe that Christ directs his disciples to pray to God and not to himself.

That the Father may be glorified in the Son,

14. If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it.

He now assigns the reason of his making this promise: it was that he might hereby glorify the Father, from whom all miraculous power proceeds. He shows the apostles, likewise, the limitation of the promise: their desire of miraculous powers was only so far to be gratified as complying with their request might contribute to the glory of the Father. On this subject there seems to have been a striking difference between Jesus and his apostles: he had a power of working miracles at his own pleasure; but they, being limited to such occasions as were deemed by the Son conducive to the divine glory, were sometimes unable to work miracles when they must have desired it; as Paul, when he left Trophimus sick at Miletus. It should be remembered, likewise, that this promise related wholly to miraculous powers, as is evident from the connection, and not to the ordinary blessings of life.

REFLECTIONS.

The words which have been explained, although they contain some things peculiar to the apostles, likewise contain important truths, which are applicable to Christians of every age.

Digitized by Google

1. It is matter of consolation to all Christians that in God's house there are many mansions, suited to the character and circumstances of every individual; none indeed for the wicked and impenitent; for without holiness no man shall see the Lord; but apartments which are adapted to real Christians of every degree. Let none of the humble followers of Jesus then despond; I will not say, however mean their condition in life, or however limited their knowledge; for these circumstances are not inconsistent with the best qualifications for heaven; but however imperfect their attainments in virtue and piety, provided these attainments are real, and proportioned to the advantages which they have enjoyed. There is a place provided for you in heaven, a mansion of glory and honour, in which you will not be disturbed for ever. Let this be your comfort and refuge amidst all the evils and distractions of life.

2. Let Christians support their minds under the absence of Christ by the considerations suggested to the apostles: he is gone to prepare a place for you, to dispose for your residence that portion of the universe which God, in his infinite wisdom, has designed for this purpose, whether it be above the sky, or, as is more probable, on this earth. He is still, therefore, acting the part of a friend, although in a manner unknown to you, and you will see him again; for when he has accomplished this necessary work, he will come and take you to himself, that you may dwell with him. Why then should you repine at his absence? It is only a separation for a short period, necessary for your benefit, and to be succeeded by an union which shall never be broken. Wherefore let not your hearts be troubled, but, comforting yourselves with this prospect, walk in the way which he has kindly pointed out to you, not doubting that it will have this happy termination.

3. Remember that in order to entertain these prospects it is necessary to exercise faith both in God and Christ: for it is upon them that you depend for the accomplishment of the whole. Labour, therefore, to

Digitized by Google

have this principle strengthened in your minds; for this purpose reflect frequently upon the manifestations of divine power, as they appear in the works of nature, and more especially in the miracles of Jesus Christ. He that could do such things must assuredly have come from God, and is a striking image of the Deity; he who was invested with power to raise Lazarus from the grave, may likewise be enabled by the same Being to raise the whole race of mankind at the last day. Let us, therefore, trust his power; for there is nothing which he may not be able to do, when thus supported and with God dwelling in him.

John xiv. 15. to the end.

Our Lord still continues to suggest topics of consolation to his apostles, oppressed with grief at the prospect of his removal from them; and with this view assures them that they will have another friend, to supply the place of him whom they were about to lose.

15. If ye love me keep my commandments.

If you feel for me so much affection as you profess by your words, or as you intimate by your looks and gestures, manifest it by observing my precepts, which will be more acceptable to me than any signs of grief which you discover at the news of my departure.

16. And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another advocate that he may abide with you for ever.

An advocate, for so the word ought to be rendered, 1 John ii. 1. among the ancients, was a person who assisted another in any cause by his presence and counsel. Such a person had Christ been to his disciples, while visibly present with them, and such would the gifts of the Holy Spirit be, which they were now to re-

Digitized by Google

ceive from God, at his departure, by explaining the nature of that dispensation which the apostles were to be employed in communicating to the world, and justifying the character which they assumed as divine teachers. The divine influence, we see, is here personified, a mode of speaking which was familiar to the Jews, and of which we have remarkable examples in what is said of wisdom in the book of Proverbs, and of sin and death in the New Testament. In like manner the providence of God is often personified in our own language. Neither this passage nor any that follow in this discourse of Christ afford any countenance to the commonly received opinion of the personal and separate existence of the Holy Spirit.

"That he may abide with you for ever." Their master remained with them but a short time; but this friend was to continue with them as long as they lived, a circumstance which would not fail to afford them much encouragement. Accordingly we find that miraculous powers continued during the whole of the apostolic age.

"I will pray the Father." These miraculous powers had been already promised by Christ and predicted by the Divine Being in the prophecies of the Old Testament, but Christ would ask them in prayer, notwithstanding, as an acknowledgment that they came from heaven; and an assurance of this nature from one who stood so high in the divine favour as their master did, would greatly strengthen the faith of his disciples. In the fourteenth verse of this chapter he had said, referring to these miraculous gifts, that whatever they should ask of God he would do; but his language now and on that occasion is perfectly consistent. After the ascension of Christ, as well as while he was visibly present with his disciples, the miraculous powers with which they were endowed came *immediately* from Christ, but *originally* from God.

17. Even the spirit of truth, *so*

Digitized by Google

called, because bestowed in order to confirm, and sometimes to communicate, the most important truth, that which is contained in the gospel of Christ, whom the world cannot receive, because it discerneth it not, neither knoweth it.

Miraculous powers were communicated only to those who believed in the divine mission of Jesus, and consequently in the existence of such powers. They were therefore withholden from the greatest part of the Jewish nation, who could perceive no traces of the existence of such powers, or of the truths which they were employed to establish. On the contrary, the disciples of Jesus, who believed the evidence of miracles, should have these powers residing in them as long as they lived.

But ye will know it; for it will dwell with you and shall be in you.

18. I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you in a little time.

The disciples were afraid that, when their master departed from them, they should be left like children without a father; but Christ assures them that he will not leave them in so destitute a condition, but come again to them himself in a very short time.

19. And the world seeth me no more, but ye will see me: because I live ye shall live also.

Although I shall not show myself publicly to the Jews after my resurrection, yet I shall appear to you, my disciples, and hereby afford you the consoling assurance that, as I your master and fellow-mortal have risen to eternal life from the grave, so shall you likewise.

Digitized by Google

20. At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you.

When I return to life and have ascended on high, you will be convinced more fully than at present of the intimate union which subsists between me and the Father; for you will find that I am perfectly acquainted with the plan which he has formed for the salvation of mankind by the gospel. You will also find in that day, in consequence of the many things which I shall explain to you, that there is an intimate union subsisting between yourselves and me, and that I am likewise perfectly acquainted with your thoughts and purposes, so that it may be said that I am in you. Christ again reminds his disciples that these favours could be expected only by those who showed their affection to him by keeping his commandments.

21. He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me; and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.

The manifestation here promised to the disciples was to be wholly of a spiritual nature, and to consist in the communication of supernatural knowledge and supernatural powers: but some of the disciples, whose minds were still occupied with the idea of his being a temporal prince, supposed that it would consist in some public appearance, and therefore wondered how it could be confined to themselves.

22. Judas saith unto him (not Iscariot) Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself to us, and not to the world?

Digitized by Google

This Judas was the brother of James, and the writer of the epistle usually called the epistle of Jude. To his question Jesus replies, by showing that he referred to a spiritual and not a visible appearance.

23. Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me he will keep my words, and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him and make our abode with him.

If any one of you show his love to me by keeping my commandments, he shall be loved by my Father and myself, and we will further show our regard for him by communicating to him, as long as he lives, a power of working miracles, which may be considered as our making our abode with him. As the rest of this discourse is addressed to the apostles, I conceive that this declaration is to be applied to them likewise, and then it refers to those miraculous powers, soon to be conferred upon them by his Father and himself, of which he had been just speaking. From Christ's saying, we will make our abode with him, joining himself with the Father, some have inferred that he must have considered himself as something more than human, since it would have been presumption in any man to have used such language: but if it be only considered that the powers of Christ were the same with those of God, being in fact derived from him, to say *we* will make our abode with him, will appear to be nothing more than a natural method of expressing that the powers which came from both would reside with him.

24. He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings; though the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's who sent me.

Christ here warns his disciples of the danger of neglecting his doctrine, since it was not only a proof

Digitized by Google

of want of affection to himself, but likewise an instance of disrespect to the Divine Being, from whom it originally came.

The language of Jesus throughout the whole of this discourse is extremely figurative, and not a little difficult to be understood, especially where he refers to the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Accordingly we find that his meaning was misconceived in one instance by Philip, and in another by Judas, and it is probable that others of the disciples experienced similar difficulties. This circumstance would produce no small degree of mortification and uneasiness in their minds. To remove it, Christ assures them that he would soon grant them such assistance as would enable them to understand all these things which were now incomprehensible.

25. These things have I spoken unto you, being yet present with you.

26. But the advocate, the Holy Spirit which the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.

All those things in my present discourses which you do not now understand, will be brought to your recollection and rendered intelligible, when the Holy Spirit, to which they refer, is bestowed, and when you have thereby also attained a more comprehensive knowledge of my religion. "Which the Father will send in my name." The Holy Spirit was given by the Father, but, coming through the hands of Christ, it is said to be sent in his name.

In this manner I understand this celebrated passage, limiting its meaning to the occasion on which it was delivered, when the disciples found themselves at a loss what construction to put upon some of the dis-

Digitized by Google

courses of their master, Many indeed consider it as a promise of miraculous assistance to their memory, in regard to every thing which Christ had taught, and derive hence an argument to prove that the gospels of Matthew and John, at least, must have been dictated by inspiration: but the promise cannot be taken in this unlimited sense, for this plain reason, that so interpreted it is contrary to fact; several things, not of essential importance indeed, being found in the accounts given by these apostles of the discourses of Christ different from and inconsistent with each other; whereas had both been dictated by inspiration, they must have been exactly alike in the smallest particular.

27. Peace I leave with you; my peace, *my wish of peace*, I give unto you; *a common form of salutation here used by Jesus, because he was very shortly to be separated from his disciples:* not as the world giveth give I unto you.

In the mouths of men in general these words are a mere form, used without reflection, but coming from me they express a sincere wish for your welfare. Every thing, therefore, that affection can do for you you may expect from me.

Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid; *while you have this assurance of my sincere affection you have nothing to fear.*

28. Ye have heard how I said unto you, I go away and come again unto you: *(see verse the third)* if ye loved me ye would rejoice, because I said I go to the Father: for my Father is greater than I.

Digitized by Google

By this language Christ does not mean to express a doubt of the sincerity of their affection in mourning for his departure; but only to assure them that, as it is the part of enlightened friendship to prefer the happiness of the object of its attachment to its own personal gratification, so, on the present occasion, joy would be a higher proof than grief of their regard to him; since he was going to a Being infinitely superior to himself, who could make him much more happy than he was in the world.

The assurance which Christ gave his disciples that he was about to go to the Father was intended to console them for his absence: he had likewise a further view in mentioning it, that the prediction of so extraordinary an event might, whenever it took place, by his visible ascension, confirm their faith in his divine mission.

29. And now I have told you before it come to pass, that when it come to pass ye might believe.

In order to understand what is said in the next verse, it is proper I should remind you of what I have hinted at more than once already; namely, that Christ and his apostles speak of the creation as under the government of two beings, who are opposed to each other, and are constantly endeavouring to counteract one another's designs; not that they really conceived the Almighty to have any such opponent, but because the idea was familiar to the Jews, and enabled them to make many convenient distinctions. The seat of the one of these beings is in heaven, and the residence of the other on the earth, or in the air. The former is called Jehovah; the other, Satan, the devil, the prince of the power of the air, or, as in this passage, the prince of the world. In this world Jehovah had no subjects but the Jews, who are therefore represented as saved or rescued: the rest of mankind, which consisted entirely of idolaters, were under the authority of his adversary, and are spoken of as aliens and enemies.

Digitized by Google

And even the Jews, by transgressing the conditions of the covenant into which God had entered with them, had chosen another master, and placed themselves under the prince of this world. Christ, therefore, is led to describe his apprehension by the chief priests and scribes as the act of the prince of this world, because performed by his subjects and agents.

30. Hereafter I shall not talk much with you, *other matters will engage our attention:* for the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me, *that is, no guilt or crime,*

31. But that the world may know that I love the Father, and that as the Father gave me commandment even so I do.

That is, the prince of this world will find nothing in me, except my resolution to make whatever sacrifices the Father requires from me, in order to let the world know how much I love him.

Arise, let us go hence.

It is supposed that, notwithstanding this declaration, Christ remained where he was for some time longer.

REFLECTIONS.

1. Let us show our love to Christ in the way which he has directed, and try the sincerity and strength of our affection by the rules which he has laid down: let us show that we love him by keeping his commandments, and judge of the proficiency which we have made in this love by the degree in

Digitized by Google

which we conform to his instructions. He is not ambitious of personal honours; he does not wish to see men rejoice at his birth, or mourn at the anniversary of his death; for he sought not his own glory; but he is principally desirous that men should obey his precepts, by practising those rules of justice, piety and benevolence which he has given them; for hereby his Father is honoured, by whose authority they were delivered, as well as himself; and hereby the happiness of the individual is secured. Every other method of doing honour to Christ is useless parade or solemn mockery. It is professing respect for the master whose commands we despise: for such friends he can have no regard; but to those who show their respect to him by complying with his directions, he will show his love in like manner; not by vain parade, but by substantial acts of kindness. The Father also will love them, and in the favour of both they will enjoy advantages and privileges which it is not easy to calculate; in few words, all the blessings of Providence and redemption, of this life and of the next.

2. The language of Christ upon this occasion affords us consolation in the prospect of death. The events which are daily taking place around us show but too plainly that we must soon die, and be laid in the grave; but, blessed be God, we need not be afraid of this change: because Christ lives, we shall live also. As certainly as our master rose from the dead, so certainly shall all his faithful followers rise likewise; his resurrection is an example and pledge of theirs. The grave will cause but a short interruption to our existence and enjoyments, to be soon followed by a new and endless life.

3. The same language which was intended for the consolation of the apostles in the absence of their master, is calculated to console us under the loss of our pious friends; they are gone to the Father, as well as he; not exactly, indeed, in the same way; for in this respect he was privileged above most of his

Digitized by Google

brethren of mankind; but they are committed to the care of the Father; and, safe in his hands, they rest in hope and sleep in Jesus; nay, in that all comprehensive mind, to which the future is like the present, they are already alive; for all live to him. If we loved them, therefore, with true and enlightened affection, we should rejoice rather than mourn at their removal.

John xv. 1—17.

In the last chapter we find Jesus proposing to his disciples to depart from the place where they were, saying, Arise, let us go hence; but, as the evangelist does not mention any removal, it is probable either that he changed his mind, or that something occurred to occasion delay. During this interval he continued his discourse to his disciples, as it is recorded in this and the following chapter. The dangers with which the apostles were soon to be surrounded would expose them to strong temptations to desert their master and renounce the profession of his religion. To guard them against this apostacy, he represents the advantages which they would derive from their connection with him, by comparing himself to a vine and his disciples to the branches.

1. I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman.

I am a vine of the right kind, productive and fruitful, and not a wild vine or a barren one. In like manner he calls himself the true light, the true bread and the good shepherd. "My Father is the husbandman." He is the proprietor of the vine, who cultivates it in the best manner.

2. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away.

In the infancy of my religion the insincere professors of it, who join themselves to the body of my dis-

Digitized by Google

ciples, but produce no good fruit, shall be separated from them by my Father, by being exposed to such temptations as they shall not be able to resist, like the traitor Judas; or to such persecutions as they shall not be willing to encounter, which will be the case with many more.

And every branch that beareth fruit he purgeth it, *rather*, "*pruneth it*," *that it may bring forth more fruit.*

Those who already bear fruit he will improve by this treatment, in the same manner as the vine dresser renders a productive branch more fruitful by pruning.

3. Ye are now clean through the word which I have spoken unto you.

The term *clean*, as applied to fruit trees, must signify clear from superfluous wood, and the meaning of Christ is the same as if he had said, You are already like pruned branches; that is, through the attention which you have paid to the doctrine that I have taught you, you are ready to produce fruit. He next informs them what it was necessary for them to do, in order to continue fruitful.

4. Abide in me and I in you; *continue to profess my religion, and let my doctrine remain in you.* As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine, no more can ye, except ye abide in me.

A branch cut off from a vine produces no fruit, neither can your virtues flourish, unless you continue connected with me. Christ cannot mean to say that his disciples by forsaking him would become destitute of every virtue, as a branch cut off from a tree is destitute of all fruit; but only that their virtues would not be so flourishing and vigorous in the one case as in

Digitized by Google

the other, as indeed he explains his meaning in the next verse.

5. I am the vine, ye are the branches. He that abideth in me and I in him, *In whom I dwell by my doctrine, and who professes my religion*, the same bringeth forth much fruit; for without me, *rather*, "*but separated from me*," ye can do nothing; *i. e. never bear much fruit.*

That these happy effects of an union with Christ are to be attributed to his doctrine, and not to any personal influence exercised over the minds of his disciples, whether ordinary or extraordinary, is evident from what he says, verse the third, Ye are now clean, through the word I have spoken unto you, where the effect is described as produced by his doctrine.

6. If a man abide not in me he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered, *or, agreeably to the conjecture of Bishop Pearce*, "*which is withered*," and men gather it and cast it into the fire, and it is burnt.

If a man abide not in me he is cast forth as a branch; he is thrown away as a withered branch; that is, he will be treated with the same contempt with which men treat withered branches, which they gather together and burn in the fire. This is generally, I believe, understood to refer to the punishment of the wicked in another life, which is usually represented by fire; but, as the rest of this discourse refers to the present life, perhaps Christ, by this language, only meant to express the useless and contemptible situation to which the apostles would be reduced, in the

Digitized by Google

apprehension of the Divine Being, by deserting their Christian profession; agreeably to what he says of them under a different figure, Ye are the salt of the earth; but if the salt have lost its savour, it is thence-forth good for nothing but to be cast out and trodden under foot of men. Matt. v. 13. On the authority of this verse the Papists have founded the cruel practice of burning heretics, rather than putting them to death in any other way.

7. If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask * what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.

If you continue to acknowledge me as your master, and if my doctrine be carefully observed by you, your prayers for miraculous powers shall be granted. This promise seems to be the same as that which is made in the fourteenth verse of the last chapter, and must be understood with the like limitation: every request for miraculous powers was to be gratified, so far as complying with it might contribute to the glory of God.

8. Herein is my Father glorified, *rather*, "*This is the will of my Father* †," that ye bear much fruit and be my disciples.

Jesus had hitherto recommended to his disciples a steady adherence to his gospel, from a regard to their personal interest; assuring them that it was necessary to their being enabled to work miracles, and to the excellence and stability of their virtue: he has now recourse to a motive of a superior order, to a regard to God, whose will it was that they should continue his disciples and bear much fruit, and whose favour they would obtain thereby. He next appeals to their regard for himself, and informs them that they cannot expect to enjoy his affection, if they do not practise what he recommends.

* See Griesbach. † See Wakefield and Schleusner.

Digitized by Google

9. As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love.

10. If ye keep my commandments ye shall abide in my love, even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love.

The argument contained in these two verses is this: My love to you is founded upon the same motives as my Father's love to me; he loves me because of my fulfilling his will by a steady profession of the truth, and I have loved you hitherto for a like reason; if you wish for a continuance in my love, persevere in the same conduct.

11. These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy in you might remain, and that your joy might be full.

I have delivered these exhortations to a stedfast adherence to my gospel, that I may not be deprived by your apostacy of the pleasure which I have received from beholding your faith; and that the satisfaction which you derive from that gospel may be lasting and complete, and not partial and temporary, as must be the case if you now renounce it.

12. This is my commandment; *my new commandment (see* xii. 34.) that ye love one another, as I have loved you.

13. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.

The highest proof of disinterested affection which one man can give to another, is to expose or sacrifice

Digitized by Google

his life for the benefit of his friend. Of this disinterested affection Christ was about to give them an example, and he requires that they imitate it, by showing a like affection to one another. To enjoin the most disinterested benevolence, and to inforce it by his own example, was highly necessary in regard to men who, like the apostles, were to be exposed to the most imminent danger in preaching the gospel and at length to suffer death.

He next intimates that then only they would continue to be regarded as his friends, when they showed their love to their brethren in this manner, by complying with this most difficult of his precepts.

14. Ye are my friends, "*you will be my friends*," if ye do whatsoever I command you.

Having called his disciples friends, he justifies the application of that honourable appellation, by showing that he had treated them in the character of friends, and not of servants.

15. Henceforth I call you not servants: for the servant knoweth not what his master doeth; but I have called, *or*, *I call* you friends: for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you.

I have spoken to you in the style of a master; giving you my commands, and you have called me by that name; but I have treated you more like friends than servants, having freely communicated to you whatever I have learnt by divine inspiration from the Father, and what it was proper for you to know; contrary to the practice of masters, who conceal from their servants and slaves all their important secrets. He tells them afterwards that there were many things which even now they were not able to bear, and that

Digitized by Google

the disclosure of them would be deferred till after his resurrection and the descent of the Holy Spirit, xvi. 12. Accordingly we find that he instructed them further when he rose from the dead. Acts i. 3.

He now mentions, as a further proof of the disinterested nature of the affection which he felt for them, that he had chosen them to the office of being his companions while he lived, and his apostles after his death, not in consequence of any regard which they had shown to him, but merely from his own good will.

16. Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you and ordained you, *rather*, " *placed you*," that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain, " *continue*;" that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name he may give it you.

" Ordained you." The original signifies " placed you," that is, in the vine; for Christ still continues the metaphor, and his meaning is that he had given them a place in the vine as branches, that is, in himself, in order that they might bear the fruits of virtue, and that those fruits might be permanent, by which means alone their petitions for miraculous powers in the exercise of their apostolic office could be rendered effectual.

17. These things I command you, that ye love one another.

REFLECTIONS.

1. From the language of Christ upon this occasion we may learn the importance of preserving our con-

Digitized by Google

nection with him as our teacher and head; it is as useful and necessary to us as to the first disciples. Thus connected, superior piety and virtue will as certainly be produced in our characters as the branches of a good vine produce good fruit: one event is as necessary and natural as the other. And it is equally certain that separated from him we can produce nothing valuable. Let no one, therefore, persuade you to break off your connection with him. What mankind could do without Christ, is an experiment that was tried many thousand years before his appearance, with what success let the idolatries and corruption of the heathen world testify: but some persons seem resolved to make the experiment a second time, and to try what they can do with the religion of nature, in a country where the religion of Christ is professed. There is reason to apprehend, however, that neither their plan of worship nor their system of morals will be mended hereby, and to suspect that every thing which they possess of superior value is borrowed from Christ. Without him there is no clear rule of duty, to guide the conduct towards men, and no idea of a pure and rational worship towards God; no example of superior excellence in our nature, to kindle emulation; no certain prospect of immortal happiness to animate our hopes, or of future punishment to awaken our fears. Without him, the mind of man is deprived of its best comforts, and virtue of its best sanctions; it is necessarily blasted and withered.

2. Let us remember that whatever virtue there may be in the vine, or whatever fruit in the branches, God is the husbandman, and that both owe all their excellencies to his cultivation. I make this observation, because some persons ascribe every thing to Christ, regarding him as the sole proprietor of the vineyard, and the vine-dresser; whereas it appears from his own language that he maintains only a subordinate situation; being the channel for conveying benefits to others, and being himself under the direction and discipline of a superior Being.

Digitized by Google

3. Let us patiently submit to such treatment as the master of the vineyard may think necessary, in order to make us bring forth more fruit. This may sometimes be severe, and be, in our apprehensions, what pruning the tree appears to those who are ignorant of its utility, likely to endanger the existence of what it is intended to improve. But we cannot be in better hands than those of infinite wisdom and perfect goodness. The methods which God adopts must be the wisest and best that could be chosen for our cultivation, and will terminate not only in accomplishing his wishes, but likewise in promoting our own benefit.

4. Let us deeply impress upon our minds the injunction so often delivered by Christ to his apostles, to love one another as he had loved them. And in what manner had he shown his love to them? Was it not by communicating to them all the supernatural knowledge of religion which he had received from the Father? Was it not by professing the truth which he was authorized to communicate, at all times, at the constant hazard of his life, and with the certain prospect before him of the loss of it? If he requires his apostles, and, by the same reasoning, his disciples in every future age, to love as he has done, his injunction can be complied with only by acting in like manner. Let us, therefore, show our love to our brethren by inviolably maintaining what we have learnt of Christ, and by professing it at all hazards: we cannot render our brethren a more essential and important service.

John xv. 18. to the end.

Jesus is still pursuing the design of fortifying the minds of his disciples against the time of his death, and that of their subsequent trials and dangers. In the beginning of this chapter he informed them of the intimate connection subsisting between himself and them, telling them that he was the vine and that they were the branches, and inculcating the necessity of

Digitized by Google

maintaining that connection unbroken; he now suggests that they must not be surprised, if, in consequence of the intimacy of this relation, they experience the same treatment as himself.

18. If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you.

By "the world" we must here understand the wicked part of the Jews, who were the majority of that nation: from them Christ had received many marks of dislike; his divine mission was denied, his miracles were reviled, and several attempts had been made to ensnare him in his discourse and to seize his person. A conspiracy was forming at this time for putting him to death: the disciples, therefore, ought not to be offended if they were exposed, as he intimates they would be, to like treatment. He next mentions another reason why they should not be surprised at this usage.

19. If ye were of the world, the world would love its own. But because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.

If you had the same principles and pursuits as your countrymen, you might have reason to expect popularity, in consequence of that affection which men of the same views and occupations naturally have for one another; but as your principles and pursuits are totally different from theirs, you must expect to be obnoxious in consequence of that dislike and enmity which mutually prevail among persons of opposite characters. To be of ths world, is to be of a worldly mind; just as the phrases "to be of the devil," and "to be of God," used by this evangelist, viii. 44. 47. signify to be of a diabolical and of a divine temper.

20. Remember the word that I said unto you, *what I told you (John* xii.

Digitized by Google

16. *Matt.* x. 24.) The servant is not greater than his master.

This is a familiar saying in common life, employed to check the hopes of those who expect too much indulgence, which I have already applied to the relation subsisting between yourselves and me, and which I now desire you again to recollect and to keep in mind as a rule of your future expectations.

If they have reviled me, they will also revile you; if they have watched my words, they will watch yours' also.

"If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you." The word which we render persecute, signifies also to revile or to accuse, and this seems to be its sense in this place, and what Christ seems to refer to, is the opprobrious appellation which they had given him, calling him Beelzebub, and attributing his miracles to a connection with the prince of dæmons. Matt. x. 24.

"If they have kept my words, they will keep yours also." That this cannot be the proper reading of these words, appears from the next verse, whence it is evident that they are to be understood in a bad sense, and must refer to the Jews watching his words that they might find something to accuse him*.

21. But all these things, *i. e. watching your words and reviling you*, will they do unto you for my name's sake, *because you bear my name, or on my account*, because they know not him that sent me.

They will show dislike to you, because they disliked me; and their enmity to me is established upon

* See Pearce, Wakefield and Macknight.

Digitized by Google

their ignorance of the perfections and character of the Being who gave me my commission, and consequently upon a dislike of the doctrine which he has authorized me to teach. Their opposition to him was owing to ignorance; that ignorance, however, would not excuse them.

22. If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin; but now they have no cloak, "*no excuse*," for their sin.

By appearing among the Jews with sufficient evidence of a divine commission, and of being prepared to instruct them in the perfections of God and in the nature of true religion, their rejection of him and their consequent ignorance were rendered inexcusable and highly criminal.

23. He that hateth me hateth my Father also.

The proof of their criminality lies in this, that their dislike of me proves their dislike of my Father, of whom my doctrine was intended to give them just ideas, and whose perfections they must have seen in my miracles. This declaration would afford comfort to the disciples, because it assured them that the ill treatment which their master received would be punished by God.

24. If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin.

If I had not performed among them greater miracles than any of the prophets, and had not, by showing my superiority to them, proved myself to be the Messiah, their crime in rejecting me would not have been so great as it is; but these works are so extraordinary as evidently to display the hand of God, and, in rejecting me, they have virtually rejected him.

Digitized by Google

But now they have both seen and hated both me and my Father.

25. But this cometh to pass, that the word might be fulfilled that is written in their law, They hated me without a cause.

The Psalms are here called the law, as they were before, x. 34. that name being given to all the sacred writings of the Jews, except the prophets. The passage is found Psalm xxxv. 19. and the expressions are applied by David to his enemies: nor is there the smallest intimation that they are prophetical of the treatment of any other person. By the expressions, therefore, "that the word might be fulfilled," we are to understand no more than that Jesus meant that the language was applicable to himself, as well as to David, without pretending that it was designed for him originally. In the preceding verses Christ had reminded his apostles of his own want of success as a divine teacher, in order to prepare them, who were to be employed in the same cause, for a like disappointment: but he now assures them of what could not fail to give them much encouragement—that his gospel would derive great assistance from the gifts of the Holy Spirit, to be bestowed upon them after his departure, and from their own testimony in his favour.

26. But when the Advocate is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the spirit of truth which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me, "*he will bear witness to me.*"

"He shall bear witness to me." The miraculous powers with which you shall be endowed by me, and which you shall exercise in my name, shall bear witness to my divine commission, in as much as they

Digitized by Google

could proceed originally from my Father only. The divine power manifesting itself in miraculous gifts is here again personified. The spirit of truth is called the advocate, because he was to plead their cause and that of Christ before the world. He is said to be sent by Christ, because these powers were at the disposal of Christ after his departure from the world, as well as during his continuance with his disciples: he is likewise said to proceed from the Father; by which Christ intends no more than that these powers, which came apparently from himself, proceeded originally from God: but in these simple words some persons have discovered the mysterious origin of the Spirit, which they have called the procession of the Holy Ghost, and supposed to be something peculiar to that Being, and to mark one of the differences between him and the Son, who is said to be begotten: where we see what important errors arise from a small mistake, and how necessary it is to be careful in interpreting scripture-language. Christ next mentions the second ground for encouragement, which was their own testimony in his favour.

27. And ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning.

Your testimony will add much weight to the evidence of miraculous powers; for you will be able to declare every thing which I have said or done, from the commencement of my public ministry.

REFLECTIONS.

1. Christians ought not to be surprised or offended, any more than the apostles, if they find themselves disliked and hated by the world, that is, by worldly minded men: their principles and pursuits are totally

Digitized by Google

different. Piety and virtue, the fear of God and the rewards of heaven, which the one value and make it their chief object to obtain, the others despise. Riches, power, fame, greatness, which men of the world worship as their God, hold but an inferior and secondary place in the estimation of the Christian. He will never depart from the principles of integrity, honour and benevolence, for any or all of these objects: but these principles are little regarded by the others. The conduct of the Christian is therefore a silent reproach to the character of the worldly minded man, and he must not be surprised if he be regarded with no small degree of ill will on this account; if his virtues be undervalued, and his actions attributed to sinister motives.

More especially may they expect this kind of treatment who openly profess the pure doctrines of Christianity, in opposition to its corruptions. Men of a proud and haughty spirit cannot bear to be told that they are in an error. If their opinion be discovered to be unfounded, they shall lose their consequence: on this account, every thing that threatens to overturn them is regarded with alarm, and that alarm receives additional interest if their opinions are connected with worldly emoluments. From men thus circumstanced there is no act of hatred or violence too great to be apprehended. But let not the friends of virtue and truth be discouraged hereby; they suffer nothing but what their master suffered before them; nothing but what might naturally be expected to arise from the character and employments by which they are distinguished. Let them rather rejoice in the opposition and ill treatment which they experience, as a proof that they are the genuine disciples of a crucified master, and that they do not belong to the world. Milder treatment and less opposition would afford ground to suspect that they belonged not to Christ.

2. We see that ignorance, where it is voluntary, is no excuse for the errors or vices which are the consequences of it. The Jews hated and rejected Christ,

Digitized by Google

because they knew not the Father. But this was no cloak for their sin; they might have known him, from the miracles performed by him and the evidence produced before their eyes, if they had not shut them against the light. Their ignorance in such circumstance was their crime, and no light crime either; it deserved severe punishment. Let us be careful that we do not hastily reject that which advances a claim to be regarded as important truth. For such conduct we shall be tried and condemned on some future day. We shall not then be asked what we actually knew, but what we might have known with the evidence which we enjoyed; and, if our knowledge has not corresponded with our advantages, we shall be condemned like the Jews. Let us, therefore, carefully examine for ourselves, and not trust to the representations of others; for we are answerable for our errors as well as our crimes.

John xvi. 1—15.

Christ had been preparing the minds of his disciples for his departure, by suggesting to them various topics of consolation, which are recorded in the two preceding chapters. He now informs them more plainly of the violence of the persecutions to which they would be exposed, and of his having used the preceding language in order to fortify their minds, and to prevent them from apostatizing from the faith, in consequence of the severity of their sufferings.

1. These things have I spoken unto you, that ye might not be offended.

To be offended, in the language of the New Testament, signifies to apostatize from the Christian faith. Compare Mark iv. 17. with Luke viii. 13. This consequence Jesus apprehended from the sufferings to which his disciples would be exposed after his

Digitized by Google

departure, and therefore delivered the preceding considerations, to console their minds and support their faith.

2. They shall put you out of the synagogues; yea the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doth God service.

To be forbidden the synagogue, was a severe punishment, because it declared the person upon whom it was inflicted unworthy of the society of virtuous and religious men. The dread of this punishment had prevented many already from declaring their faith in Jesus, and might induce the apostles themselves to abandon their Christian profession, if they were not well grounded in the faith. This punishment, however, would be far from satisfying the zeal and animosity of their countrymen. To kill them, would be deemed offering a religious service to God. The original words are the same as are applied to the Jewish sacrifices, and intimate that killing a Christian would be supposed as acceptable to God as offering a sacrifice. An example of the fulfilment of the latter part of this prediction you will have in Acts xxiii. 13, 14, where more than forty Jews bind themselves with a curse not to eat or drink until they had killed Paul.

3. And these things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father nor me.

The Jews were acquainted with God, so far as to know that he was the only true God; but they had not just views of his designs respecting the Messiah, nor did they acknowledge the pretensions of Jesus to that character.

4. But these things have I told you, that when the time shall come

Digitized by Google

ye may remember that I told you of them.

I have forewarned you of the treatment you are to receive, that when you experience it you may not think I have endeavoured to deceive you, by giving you false expectations, and so be induced to reject my religion.

And these things I said not unto you at the beginning, because I was with you:

I said not these things to you in the beginning of my ministry, because the whole weight of the popular odium fell upon me, and you had then nothing to apprehend; but, as you are henceforth to be the sole supporters and advocates of this cause, it will all fall upon you, and it was for this reason proper that I should warn you of what awaits you.

5. But now I go my way to him that sent me.

These words ought to be joined to the preceding verse, and contain the reason why the disciples were to expect ill treatment, and why Jesus prepared them for it.

And none of you asketh me, Whither goest thou?

Peter had said to him, a short time before, when he talked of his departure from them, (xiii. 36.) Master, whither goest thou? and what Thomas had said, (xiv. 5.) Master, we know not whither thou goest, and how can we know the way? amounted nearly to the same question. What Christ, therefore, means to complain of is that they did not put this question to him at this time, while he was speaking to them, but suffered themselves to be overwhelmed with grief at the prospect of his departure and their consequent

Digitized by Google

sufferings: whereas, had they inquired whither he was going, he would have given them such an answer as would have relieved their sorrow.

6. But, because I have said these things unto you, sorrow hath filled your heart.

7. But I tell you the truth, it is expedient for you, "*it is better for you*," that I go away; for if I go not away, the advocate will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him to you.

The apostles were filled with sorrow at the prospect of losing their master, and could not conceive how such a calamitous event could be conducive to their welfare; but Jesus solemnly assures them that it would be so, and informs them by what means. In consequence of complying with the will of God, by laying down his life, he should, when raised from the dead, and ascended on high, be honoured with the privilege of bestowing upon them the advocate, or, which is the same thing, extraordinary miraculous powers, which would be the highest honour and benefit to those upon whom they were conferred, giving them the greatest distinction among men, and enabling them to propagate his religion in the world. This would more than compensate for the absence of himself. He next mentions some of the effects which would be produced by this advocate in his personal character.

8. And when he is come, he will reprove, *or*, "*he will convince*," the world of sin and of righteousness and of judgment:

Digitized by Google

9. Of sin, because they believe not on me:

He will convince many of the Jews that they have been guilty of a great sin in rejecting me; for the extraordinary miracles which will be wrought in my name will prove that God had sent me.

10. Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more:

The miraculous powers conferred on you, joined to the circumstance of my ascending up to God and disappearing from among men, will convince many of the Jews of my righteousness or innocence.

11. Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged.

That is, that there is a just judge of the world, who will condemn and punish those who oppose his designs; in as much as the Jewish state, which will put me to death, shall be punished for that offence by being entirely destroyed. It has been already observed to you, upon John xiv. 30, that the Jews, and after them Christ and his apostles, speak of the universe as under two masters, the one called Jehovah, the other, Satan, the prince of the world, and several other names; the one, the patron of virtue and piety; the other, of idolatry and darkness; the one, residing in and presiding over the world; the other, enthroned in the heavens. All opposition to the plans and counsels of Jehovah is attributed to this evil being. Hence, in the passage above referred to, Jesus speaks of the prince of the world as coming to apprehend him, when he only means that his agents, the scribes and Pharisees, were about to do so. They are the same persons, likewise, to whom he refers, when he says here that the prince of the world will be judged, meaning the Jewish state, which, for its rejection of him, was entirely overthrown.

Digitized by Google

12. I have yet many things to say unto you; but ye cannot bear them now.

What these things were can only be matter of conjecture; but Christ might probably wish to speak to his disciples about the abolition of the Jewish law, the call of the Gentiles, and the intercourse and fellowship which ought to subsist between Jews and them, and some other things of a like obnoxious nature. But they were so opposite to the most rooted prejudices of Jews, that to have mentioned them at this time, might have endangered their attachment to Christianity itself: for this reason they were wisely deferred, and left to be communicated at a future period, when, their faith having derived additional strength from the resurrection and ascension of their master, and from the gift of tongues on the day of Pentecost, they could receive these new truths without any danger of abandoning what they had been already taught. He next informs them by whom these obnoxious truths were to be communicated.

13. Howbeit, *or*, "*but*," when the spirit of truth is come, he will guide you into all the truth; for he shall not speak from himself, but whatsoever he shall hear that shall he speak, and he will show you things to come.

"He shall guide you into all truth." These general expressions, like others of the same nature, must be limited to the subject of which the person by whom they are used is speaking. It would be extravagant to suppose that Christ meant to promise his disciples that the spirit would instruct them in the principles of natural philosophy, or in the science of the human mind, so as to make them infallible guides on that and every other subject. The phrase "all truth," can certainly mean nothing more than all parts of the

Digitized by Google

gospel dispensation, some of which, although already communicated, they did not understand, and others were not yet disclosed, because they were not able to bear them. This assistance they were to receive from the spirit: he was also to show them things to come, that is, to enable them to foretel future events: but these things must be understood with the same limitation as before, and be confined to those subjects which were connected with religion. In this manner we must have interpreted the general expressions in this passage, if we had been left, as we are in other instances, to our own judgment. But, on the present occasion, Christ himself has directed his words to be understood in this manner: for he tells us that the spirit shall not speak from himself, but the things which he has heard; that is, he will not communicate general information, as he might do if he spoke of his own accord, but such things only as he should receive direction to communicate, or things relating to the gospel.

14. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you.

15. All things that the Father hath are mine; therefore said I that he should take of mine, and show it unto you.

Every thing which God intends to communicate to the world by the Christian dispensation, is intrusted to my care and superintendance; whatever part of this system, therefore, the Holy Spirit may be authorized to communicate, must reflect honour upon me, whose agent and representative only he is in this matter.

"All things that the Father hath are mine." This expression has been considered as pointing out the equality of the Son with the Father; and Dr. Macki-

Digitized by Google

night says that those who oppose the divinity of Christ seem to be at a loss for an explanation of this passage; but I conceive that that which has now been given is intelligible and satisfactory. It only requires us to admit, what all interpreters of scripture are obliged to allow in some instances, that general expressions are to be taken with considerable limitation.

REFLECTIONS.

1. We may observe what gross ignorance of God, of religion and of human nature they discover, who imagine that to slaughter human beings can be an acceptable sacrifice to the Deity, or tend to promote the cause of truth in the world. How little do they know of the great Father of mankind, who loves all his children with parental affection, and when they fall into error would have them instructed and reclaimed, not destroyed! How little do they know of the nature of true religion, which seeks support from evidence and not from violence, and teaches us to do good even to our enemies! How little are they acquainted with the temper of the human mind, who imagine that error can be restrained and truth promoted by such means; forgetting that men are disposed to hold the faster what is attempted to be taken from them by force, and that acts of cruelty in no degree tend to soften prejudices and conciliate affection!

2. Let not the friends of truth and virtue be surprised or offended, if they are exposed to the same ill treatment as the apostles and first Christians experienced.

Although the experiment has been made a thousand times without success, the wickedness and folly of

Digitized by Google

persecution have not yet been sufficiently exposed. Christians have exclaimed against it, when exercised by Jews and heathens against themselves, but have justified the conduct of both by exercising it against each other. Papists have persecuted Protestants with unrelenting cruelty, and the different sects of Protestants have persecuted each other: and there is reason to fear that the practice will be continued, in one form or another, as long as Christianity shall be in any considerable degree corrupted, or pride, ignorance and ambition occupy the human heart. Persecution is, indeed, disclaimed by all, because expressly condemned by the sacred scriptures, and therefore their unhallowed zeal has assumed various disguises: sometimes it is a concern to preserve the authority of the civil magistrate; sometimes, a love of peace and a desire of union. The means employed have likewise been various: sometimes stripes, imprisonment and death: at other times, the lighter evils of prohibitions from the synagogues and places of worship; calumnies and censures: but whatever the nature of the evils inflicted, or the disguise assumed, they all proceed from one and the same spirit; they are all of one family and belong to the same viperous brood. Whenever an injury is done to men on account of their opinions, in their persons, property or reputation, by whatever means effected, there is persecution. But it is no real disgrace to him who suffers the injury, but rather an honour; for it is the hatred of the ignorant, the interested and the vicious, and ranks him with the professors and martyrs of the church, with Christ and his apostles.

3. The conduct of Christ, in chusing the most favourable season for inculcating the truth, is an instance of his wisdom which deserves our imitation. Some things he deferred to teach, because his disciples were not yet prepared to receive them, and a hasty communication might have endangered their attachment to the gospel itself; and he wisely judged that it would be wrong to hazard the whole for the sake of a part. Every judicious instructor will follow the like method.

Digitized by Google

Where a system of truth is to be communicated, he will begin with simple principles, before he proceed to those which are more complicated; with what is easy to be understood, before what is difficult, and with what is least objectionable, before he ventures to propose what is most obnoxious. In this manner the mind may be gradually brought to make the most important conclusions, which it would have rejected without hesitation, had they been proposed in the first instance.

But because Christ instructed his disciples gradually, and deferred some things till after his death, because his disciples were not able to bear them, some persons have strangely inferred that they might hold themselves excused from teaching the truth at all, where it is obnoxious, asserting that men are not prepared to bear it: but the two cases, I apprehend, are not parallel. What Christ deferred to teach, were such things only as, if taught at that time, might have occasioned apostacy from the Christian religion: but what they conceal might indeed, if disclosed, give offence, and procure them the ill will of many persons, but is not likely to shake their Christian faith. What he kept back was only kept for a few weeks, or a few months at most, till a time when he was certain that there would be an opportunity of teaching it to more advantage; but they defer for imaginary contingencies, which may never happen, or which, if they do take place, will afford no better opportunity than the present. Christ was afraid of injuring his disciples by a hasty communication of the truth. They are only concerned for their own peace and quiet. From a regard to this they ungenerously throw the whole burden of teaching obnoxious truths upon posterity, and leave to them all the odium and danger of maintaining an unpopular cause. The discoveries which he delayed were then communicated to the world for the first time; what they conceal was long since made known by divine wisdom, but lost by the folly of mankind. In cases which are so dissimilar, I must leave you to determine whether the same conduct is justifiable, and

Digitized by Google

to judge, whether the one be not the wise precaution of a person who had a perfect acquaintance with the human heart, and a supernatural knowledge of future events; and the other, the affected prudence of an interested selfishness.

John xvi. 16. to the end.

Jesus, in endeavouring to console his disciples, who were overwhelmed with grief at the prospect of losing their master, assures them that his absence would be only for a short season.

16. A little while and ye shall not see me, and on the contrary, a little while and ye shall see me, because I go to the Father.

What Christ means by this language is, that in a short time he should be taken from them, by being put to death, but that, very soon afterwards, he should be restored to them, as he was to rise from the dead within three days, in order to ascend to God. But as his disciples did not expect the death of their master, or, if he was to die, his immediate resurrection from the dead, they did not understand his language.

17. Then said some of his disciples among themselves, What is this that he saith unto us, a little while and ye shall not see me; and on the contrary, a little while and ye shall see me; and, Because I go to the Father?

18. They said therefore, What is this that he saith, A little while? We cannot tell what he saith.

Digitized by Google

What perplexed them most was that these changes were to take place so soon, of which they saw no prospect. They wished to ask their master to explain his meaning, but they were afraid to confess their ignorance, lest he should reprove them for it, as he had done in former instances. Christ, perceiving it, addressed them himself, in order to explain his meaning more fully and satisfy their wishes.

19. Now Jesus knew that they were desirous to ask him, and said unto them, Do ye enquire among yourselves of that I said, A little while and ye shall not see me, and on the contrary, a little while and ye shall see me?

20. Verily, verily I say unto you that ye shall weep and lament; but the world shall rejoice; and ye shall be sorrowful; but your sorrow shall be turned into joy.

That they might understand to what kind of event he referred, when he spake of leaving them and returning again, he tells them that it was such as would give great joy to his enemies, the unbelieving part of the Jewish nation, while it excited the deepest sorrow in their own breasts. It should afford them comfort, however, to think that their sorrow would be but of short continuance, and would be followed by joy which would more than compensate for what they had previously suffered. So that their case would resemble that of a woman, who suffers the pains of child birth, whose joy at the birth of a child more than rewards her for the sufferings which she has endured.

21. A woman, when she is in tra-

Digitized by Google

vail, hath sorrow, because her hour is come; but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for the joy that a man, "*a human being*," is born into the world.

22. And ye now likewise have sorrow; but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy shall no man take from you.

As Christ, when he rose from the dead, was to die no more, the joy which his disciples felt at seeing him again, and beholding him rewarded by the Divine Being, would never from that time be interrupted. He was to be with them also by his miraculous powers to the end of the age; that is, as long as they lived in the world; a circumstance which could not fail to give them the highest satisfaction.

23. And in that day ye shall ask me nothing.

That is, at the time when I am no longer present with you. When the disciples were in danger or wanted information, they applied to their master for help and instruction; and what filled them with sorrow at the prospect of his absence, was the apprehension of no longer enjoying his assistance, and of not being able to have recourse to him in all their straits and difficulties. To appease their fears, Christ tells them that they will now have no occasion to apply to him for any thing: for that there was another friend, who would be ready to afford them all the assistance which they might want.

Verily, verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name he will give it you.

Digitized by Google

To ask for any thing in the name of Christ, is to ask for it as his disciples, as those who profess his religion, and are employed, by his direction, upon a mission for propagating it in the world. Petitions presented by such persons, and for carrying on such a work, could not fail to be answered. It is not to be supposed, however, that the express mention of the name of Christ was necessary for the success of their prayers. It would be sufficient, no doubt, if they regarded themselves as his disciples. The promise of Christ is accompanied with no limitation; but it is necessary to confine it to such things as were agreeable to the will of the Father, and necessary for accomplishing their mission. Paul, we find, prayed for the removal of the thorn in the flesh without success.

24. Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name; ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full.

The disciples had hitherto applied to Jesus, their master, in their difficulties; but as he was now about to leave them, he directs them to apply to God as his disciples, and assures them of success. To have their prayers answered, by the grant of miraculous assistance, and to find themselves hereby qualified for encountering all difficulties in the execution of their office, could not fail to afford them the highest satisfaction and joy.

25. These things have I spoken unto you in proverbs, "*in dark speeches:*" the time cometh when I shall no more speak unto you in dark speeches, but I will show you plainly of the Father.

As these discourses of Christ refer to events which had not yet taken place, and of which his disciples had very imperfect conceptions, his language was ne-

Digitized by Google

cessarily obscure; but he assures them that the time would come, when, either in person or by his representative and agent, the Holy Spirit, he would instruct them more fully in the designs of the Father respecting the Christian dispensation.

26. At that day ye shall ask in my name, *as my disciples:* and I say not unto you that I will pray the Father for you.

To have told his disciples that he would do so, would have implied that the Father was not of his own accord inclined to hear them, and that the intercession of another was necessary to their success, which was contrary to fact*.

27. For the Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God.

These words contain the reason why the disciples might hope for success by an immediate application to the Father in prayer. It was because God loved them; which love was founded upon their loving his son, and believing in his divine mission. The last clause of the verse serves to explain to us what Christ intended by "asking in his name:" it was only asking as those who love him and believe in him, or, in other words, asking as his disciples. This passage also shows that Christ intended that his disciples should apply to the Father for what they might want after his departure from them.

Jesus, having in this verse expressed his divine mission by the phrase "coming out from God," takes an opportunity of declaring to his disciples in similar phrases, that his mission was about to cease.

* Another interpretation of this passage is given in the Theological Repository, Vol. iv. p. 343, &c.

Digitized by Google

28. I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world; and, on the contrary, I leave the world and go to the Father.

To come forth from God, is to come with a divine commission; and to come into the world, is to come with it into a state of exercise and trial. To leave the world, therefore, is to withdraw from these trials; and to go to the Father, is to return to the Being from whom the commission was received, in whatever place he chooses to manifest his special presence.

This explanation of the phrase "coming into the world," corresponds with the language used even in modern times, for it is usual to speak of mens' coming into the world, or retiring from it, when we have no reference to quitting the earth, or coming into it; and only mean appearing in public life, or withdrawing into privacy. It is also agreeable to the language of Christ, upon another occasion, who says of his disciples, As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world, John xvii. 18. If any, however, should dislike this interpretation, and suppose that by the world Christ here means, as he does in a variety of instances in the New Testament, the wicked and profligate part of mankind, the sense of the passage will be nearly the same. In neither case is it necessary to suppose that Christ came from another system of the universe into our own, or that when he left the world he quitted the earth*.

The disciples now understood what he had referred to in his former discourse, and found him so well acquainted with their difficulties and their inquiries, that they could not help regarding it as a proof of supernatural knowledge, and a fresh evidence of his having a divine mission.

* Theological Repository, Vol. iii. p. 357, &c.

Digitized by Google

29. His disciples said unto him, Lo, now speakest thou plainly, and usest no dark speech.

From his having contrasted his leaving the world with his coming into it, they began to understand to what he referred. The next words relate to the miraculous knowledge which he discovered.

30. Now we are sure that thou knowest all things, and needest not that any man should ask thee.

To know all things, is to know the thoughts of men as well as their actions. That Christ possessed this knowledge they were assured from his having discovered what they were enquiring about among themselves; and hence they infer that it was unnecessary to ask him questions, since he knew before hand what it was about which they wished to be satisfied.

By this we believe that thou camest forth from God.

Thy supernatural knowledge, which could come from God alone, affords us rational proof that God sent thee, and that he gave thee this knowledge as a testimony to thy mission.

31. Jesus answered them, Do ye now believe?

32. Behold the hour cometh, yea is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, *rather*, "*every man in his own way**", and shall leave

* Wakefield.

Digitized by Google

me alone; and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me.

Do you say that your faith in me is confirmed by what you have now heard from me? I can assure you that in a very short time from this moment you will behave as if your faith in me were weakened; flying from me in every direction, and leaving me alone, as far as you are able to do so; for I never can be left entirely so, since the Father dwells in me by his divine power.

33. These things have I spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace; *that in my promise ye may find consolation and joy:* in the world ye will have tribulation; but be of good courage, I have overcome the world.

Be not discouraged by the difficulties which you will have to encounter from the wicked part of mankind: for I have been exposed to them myself, and overcome them; and my success you may consider as a pledge of your own.

REFLECTIONS.

1. From the language of Christ to his disciples on this occasion, we have great encouragement to go to God, and we learn in what manner we may do it most acceptably. What better argument can be offered to induce us to go to ask a favour of a friend, than that he loves us, and that, he is inclined to do us good of his own accord, and that, to encourage our confidence, he assumes the character of our Father? Such is the character under which the Almighty is here represented; some terms, indeed, he proposes as the

Digitized by Google

conditions of enjoying his favour; but they are such as all may comply with: they consist in believing the divine mission of his Son, in endeavouring to conform to his precepts, and in being sincerely concerned for every instance in which they are known to be transgressed. He who has done this is sufficiently prepared for being introduced into the divine presence, and for enjoying the divine favour, and needs not the intercession or merit of another. To suppose that any other preparation is necessary, is an imputation upon the benevolence of the great Father of mankind, as if he were not sufficiently inclined, of himself, to do them good, and as if the righteousness or persuasion of a third person were requisite to procure his bounty. Far from us be such injurious conceptions of the bountiful author of all good.

2. We may learn where to seek for peace in time of trouble; in the promises and declarations of Jesus, which give us the best views of God and of his providence; teaching us that the hairs of our head are all numbered; that he who takes care of the fowls of the air and of the lillies of the field will not fail to take care of men; that the sorrows to which we are exposed in the profession of his religion are but of short duration, and that the joy by which they are followed is lasting, and such as no one can take from us; that in his Father's house are many mansions, suited to every degree of virtue, and that he is to prepare a place for us, and will come again and receive us to himself. Are you then already in trouble from any cause? In such considerations as these, and in others of a like kind, you will find repose. No calamity can be so great, that under the weight of it you may not hence derive consolation and support. Are you apprehensive of evil to come, and on that account unhappy? Here you may fortify your mind to bear it. Let the discourses of Christ then be continually in your hands and ever in your minds. Nothing can better prepare you for trouble or support you under it.

Digitized by Google

3. The conduct of Christ, in overcoming the world, may well encourage our endeavours to overcome it, as well as those of the apostles. In him we behold one in our own nature, with the same feelings and passions as ourselves, assailed with every temptation to desert his duty which fear, interest or ambition could produce, yet bravely withstanding them all; and what should prevent us from obtaining a like triumph? Have we not the same promises to rely on? The same God to assist us? The same heaven to reward our integrity? Is not his victory a sure pledge of ours? With such assistance then, and with such an example of success before our eyes, let us go forth to the conflict without dismay.

John xvii. 1—12.

Jesus, having in the preceding discourse said every thing which he thought proper to console and encourage his disciples under the painful prospect of his removal, and knowing that the moment of his apprehension was very near, turns to God, and addresses him in a solemn prayer, which occupies the whole of the next chapter. In the first part of it he prays for himself, afterwards for his apostles, and lastly, for all future believers.

1. These words spake Jesus, and lift up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come: glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee.

The glory which Christ here desires from his Father is no doubt the same as that of which he had spoken in the preceding discourse, which, as was there shown, consisted in the success of his gospel, or the spreading of his religion in the world. For when the Greeks, who were Gentiles, expressed a wish to

Digitized by Google

see him, he observed, The hour is come that the son of man should be glorified; that is, as the connection shows, by the spread of his religion among heathens. It is to the spread of his religion, and to the extraordinary events which were necessary for that purpose, such as his resurrection from the dead, his exaltation and the gifts of the Holy Spirit, that he now refers, when he prays that the Father would glorify the Son. The motive which induced him to make the request, and by which he supports it, is that God may be glorified; and it is as if he had said, The hour of my death is come; inflict upon me, O Father, thy favourite messenger and Son, such sufferings as thou seest to be requisite to promote my glory and thy own by the advancement of the gospel.

2. As thou hast given him authority over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him;

The request is here supported by an additional motive: complying with it was necessary for completing a scheme which had been already begun, and in part accomplished. As God had authorized him to promise that he should bestow eternal life upon all who became his disciples, his death and removal from the present state were necessary to the accomplishment of that promise.

3. And this is life eternal, *the means of obtaining it*, that they might know thee to be the only true God, and Jesus whom thou hast sent, to be the Christ: *for so the passage may be rendered.*

Nothing is necessary to obtaining this eternal life, but just ideas of thee as the only living God, and

Digitized by Google

the acknowledgment of me as the Messiah, accompanied with the practice consequent thereon.

4. I have glorified thee on the earth; I have finished the work thou gavest me to do.

God was glorified by the miracles which Christ performed, and by the supernatural knowledge which he discovered, which evidently appeared to come from the Divine Being, and gave the people exalted ideas of his power and wisdom. The work which he had to do was to preach the gospel to the Jews in general, and so to establish the faith of his disciples in his divine mission, and to give them such just views of the nature of his kingdom, as would qualify them for propagating his religion after he was removed from the world. This trust he could now appeal to God that he had discharged with fidelity and integrity.

5. And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self, with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.

Whatever be the nature of this glory, it is evident that it could not be any original dignity, possessed by Christ before he came into the world, and to which he wishes to be restored; for he prays for it as the reward of his services, and a reward must be something new or additional: what men enjoyed before does not deserve that name.

I conceive, therefore, that the glory here referred to can be no other than that mentioned before, arising from the miracles which accompanied the death of Christ and his resurrection from the dead, his exaltation to a happy life in the immediate presence of God, and particularly, from the success of the gospel in the world. He prays that this glory may now be bestowed upon him, agreeably to the intentions of the Divine Being from the earliest periods:

Digitized by Google

he is, indeed, said to have had it already with God before the world was. But this language can occasion no difficulty to those who recollect that God is said to have chosen us, that is, to have elected us to the privileges of Christians, and to have given us his grace, before the foundation of the world, and before the world began, 2 Tim. i. 9. Eph. i. 4. For if Christians are said to receive grace, and to be elected to privileges, before they are actually conferred, because these things are designed for them in the divine mind, Christ may, agreeably to the same language, be said to have glory with God before the world was, although not yet given. That it was a glory promised, and not actually given, to which he here refers, is evident from what he says to his disciples in this same prayer, verse the twenty-second. "The glory which thou gavest me I have given them," meaning his disciples; but the glory of spreading the gospel was not given, but only promised to them at this time, and therefore the glory of Christ was of a like nature.

If any should inquire why Christ should use such figurative language, in a solemn prayer addressed to God just before his death, it may be answered that it was probably familiar to the Jews, and that to speak of what is promised as already bestowed, expresses greater confidence in the faithfulness of God. As this prayer was pronounced in the presence of his disciples, it was out of regard to the impression which it might make upon their minds that he spoke thus. Having prayed for himself, he prays next for his disciples, that God would give them success in their work; declaring at the same time how well qualified they were for it, and how necessary their success was to his own glory.

6. I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world.

The name of God is the same as God himself, and Christ's meaning is, "I have made known thy per-

Digitized by Google

fections and counsels to these men, whom thou hast inclined to be my disciples and apostles."

Thine they were, and thou gavest them me, and they have kept thy word.

They were sincere believers in thee, according to the dispensation of Moses, and thou hast inclined them to become believers in me; and it is not in vain that they have been instructed by me in thy nature and counsels; for they have kept thy commandments. Here was ground for gratitude to God on the part of Jesus, and for expecting the continuance of his favour to his disciples; for they appeared to deserve it. *He* now mentions other reasons for affording them the divine protection.

7. Now they have known that all things, whatsoever thou hast given me, are of thee:

They know that all my doctrines and miracles proceed from thee, and are therefore worthy of thy favour. This declaration he explains more fully in the next verse.

8. For I have given unto them the words, "*the doctrines*," which thou gavest me, and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from thee; and they have believed that thou didst send me.

They believe for certain that I came from thee and have a divine commission, and therefore have received, as coming from thee, whatever I have taught them. The reason why Jesus thus mentions the qualifications of his disciples, is to show that they were fit for receiving the divine protection and favour in propa-

Digitized by Google

gating the gospel, and that the glory which he hoped for he expected by their means.

9. I pray for them; I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine.

In these words Christ assigns the reasons why he prayed to God for his disciples: it was because while they were his disciples, they belonged also to God, and were to be employed in executing his purposes in the world: this gave him reason to hope that his prayers for them would be heard. He does not mean to say that the unbelieving part of the world were not to be prayed for, since he prays for them himself in the twenty-first verse; but that they were not the persons about whom he was concerned at present. Having said that his disciples belonged to the Father, he is led to make a more general declaration, that every thing which he had was his.

10. And all mine are thine and thine are mine, and I am glorified in them.

Or, as the verse has been more intelligibly rendered, "Indeed all things that are mine are thine, and all things that are thine are mine, and I am glorified thereby." That is, all my extraordinary powers proceed from thee, and every thing of thine relating to the Christian dispensation is communicated to me, or is at my disposal; and these circumstances reflect upon me the highest honour.

11. And now I am no more in the world;

By this expression Christ probably does not mean to say that he was going to quit the earth for ever, but only that he was going to leave that scene of exercise and trial in which he had been engaged, which

Digitized by Google

is a sense in which we often understand the term world. He appeared, long after his resurrection and ascension, to the apostle Paul, once at least, if not more frequently, which could not have been the case if the expression was to be understood literally. This sense of the word seems to be confirmed by what he immediately adds,

But these are in the world, and I come to thee.

They are in that scene of temptation and danger which I am quitting, and therefore stand in need of that assistance which I no longer want; because I am coming to dwell where thou art pleased to manifest thy more immediate presence.

Holy Father, keep through thine own name, *rather*, " *in thine own name*," those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one as we are.

Keep in the knowledge and worship of thyself those my disciples, that they may be united in affection to us, as we are united to each other. The reason of this anxiety which he felt about his disciples was the prospect of being separated from them, when they would no longer enjoy the benefit of his instructions and counsels; for he adds,

12. While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name, *in the knowledge and worship of thyself.* Those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition, that the scripture might be fulfilled.

Digitized by Google

"The son of perdition," is a Hebrew phrase for a person that deserves perdition*. It is by this language that Christ describes Judas the traitor. The passage of scripture to which he is supposed to allude is Ps. cix. 8.

REFLECTIONS.

1. From this admirable prayer of Christ we may learn what ought to interest us most at the approach of death. It is the honour of God, in the advancement of the cause of truth and righteousness in the world, and the religious interests of those who are dear to us. These were the objects which engaged the attention of our master in his last moments. He is not concerned for himself, so much as for others. If he prays for his own glory, it is only so far as it is founded upon the success of the gospel and the glory of God, and connected with them. When he prays for his disciples, it is not that God would make them rich or great, when he was gone; but that he would preserve them in the path of truth into which they had been first led by himself. In like manner, when we come to die, let not the sufferings of nature confine all our attention to ourselves; let us still offer our good wishes and fervent prayers for the prevalence of genuine Christianity in the world; and while we commend our friends and relatives to the care of Divine Providence, let us show ourselves more concerned about their religious conduct than about their worldly prosperity; that they may continue good, rather than that they may become great.

2. We see that Christ prays for what he knew would be granted; for glory which it was in the divine intention to give him before the world was, and

* 2 Samuel xii. 5. Matt. xxiii. 15.

Digitized by Google

the communication of which did not depend upon his petitions. Nevertheless, it was natural to express to a friend and father the wish for what it was desirable to obtain. The act of doing it would impress his own mind with the recollection of him from whom it proceeded, and with a sense of his obligations to the divine goodness in bestowing it. The possession of this glory was, therefore, very properly made the subject of prayer. Hence we may derive a rule for the direction of our own conduct. Although we may have reason to think that God will bestow upon us the ordinary blessings of life, let not this prevent us from asking them in prayer, or from acknowledging his goodness in bestowing them.

3. This prayer of Christ furnishes us with a striking example of the composure of his mind and the dignity of his character. A few minutes only before he knew that a band of soldiers were coming to apprehend him, after which he should be treated in the most ignominious manner, and at length put to death with circumstances of the greatest pain and cruelty, he is able to address a solemn prayer to God, full of reverence for the divine character and of submission to the divine will, and of benevolent regards to his disciples. He calls God his Father, although he knew what he was about to inflict upon him: the disgrace and sufferings of the cross, he calls being glorified, on account of the consequences which were to ensue. What steady faith in God must be in the man that could use such language and behave with so much composure in such circumstances!

John xvii. 13. to the end.

Christ began this prayer with praying for the glory destined for him in the divine counsels before the foundation of the world, that is, for the honours intended him by his death, resurrection, exaltation and the spread of his religion in the world. As his dis-

Digitized by Google

ciples were to be the instruments employed in this great work of converting the world, he mentioned what he had done for them, how well they had received his instructions, and how worthy they were of enjoying the divine protection and favour, to which he commended them. He now mentions the reason why he had addressed this prayer to God in their hearing.

13. And now come I to thee; and these things I speak in the world, that they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves, *rather*, " *in them.*"

What Christ had before called his glory, that is, the success of his gospel, he now calls his joy, and says that he offers this prayer, at his departure from the world, that this joy might be completed in his disciples, that is, that it might rise to the highest pitch by their complete success.

14. I have given them thy word, and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.

Here was a fresh motive for divine protection: those for whom it was requested had incurred the hatred of the unbelieving and wicked part of the Jews, by receiving the revelation which Jesus had brought from God, and this, on principles of piety and virtue, which animated them as well as their master. Those, therefore, who suffered in his cause, were peculiarly entitled to his regards, and stood in peculiar need of them. From what Christ now said about his disciples being hated by the world, they might be led to suppose that he wished them to be removed from it, as he was about to be. To prevent his meaning from being misunderstood, he explains it in the next verse.

Digitized by Google

15. I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil, *rather*, "*from the evil one*," *that is, the devil.*

I pray not that thou wouldest remove them from public life, as thou art about to remove me; but that thou wouldest preserve them from apostatizing from the Christian faith in consequence of the sufferings to which they will be exposed, and from acting in any other way, from that cause, in a manner unbecoming my disciples. The words of Christ imply that temptations to apostacy and to other offences proceed from the devil, an imaginary being, the principle of evil personified.

16. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.

This persecution is no more than what is to be expected by my disciples: for the principles by which they are governed, as well as myself, are totally different from those of the unbelieving Jews.

17. Sanctify them through thy truth; thy word is truth.

To sanctify, in the ceremonial sense of the word, is to fit for the service of God, and Christ here prays that his disciples may be fitted for that service in preaching the gospel, by a firm belief of the truth. That the apostles might understand what truth he meant, he adds, Thy word is truth; that is, the gospel revelation is that truth to which I refer.

18. As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world.

As thou hast given me, so have I given them, a commission to preach the gospel. As no one here

Digitized by Google

supposes that the apostles pre-existed, because they are said to be sent into the world, we ought not to conclude that Christ did, because similar language is used concerning him.

19. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth.

I have prepared myself for the service of God, in undertaking the office of a divine messenger, for their sakes, that I might qualify them, by the communication of the truth, for the same service in preaching the gospel to the world.

Having prayed for himself and his apostles, he proceeds to intercede for the first Christians; and what he has to request for them, is that they may be joint partakers with himself in miraculous powers; in order that the world, from these marks of divine favour bestowed upon his disciples, may derive fresh evidences of his divine mission, and be convinced that the disciples of Jesus are as much the objects of divine regard as their master.

20. Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; *for the proselytes whom they may make*;

21. That they all may be one, as thou Father art in me and I in thee; that they also may be one in us, that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.

The Father was in Christ by the miraculous gifts communicated to him, and Christ was in the Father by the knowledge which he had of the divine counsels respecting the Christian dispensation. This relation constituted an union of powers and counsels, or made

Digitized by Google

them one; and Christ prays here that there may be the like union between them both and the first proselytes to Christianity, by a like participation of divine power; which request he enforces by the consideration that this would tend to establish the evidence of his divine mission. For if the disciples of a master who professed to come from God were distinguished by such extraordinary marks of divine favour, it was a complete proof that his pretensions were well founded. For the illustration of this passage see John xiv. 10, 11, 20, 23.

22. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one even as we are one;

23. I in them and thou in me;

The honour of enjoying miraculous powers, by which I have been distinguished, I have also destined for them, that they may be united to me as I am united to thee: I dwelling in them by miraculous powers, and thou dwelling in me by the same means.

That they may be made perfect in one, *that they may make up a complete person, or a perfect whole*; that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them as thou hast loved me.

That the world may know, by the communication of these miraculous powers, that thou bearest the same affection to my disciples as to myself. Such a persuasion will be a strong inducement to men to become my disciples.

24. Father, I will, *rather*, "*I desire*," that they also whom thou hast

Digitized by Google

given me be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory which thou hast given me; for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world.

The last thing that Christ requests for his disciples is that they may be with him in his heavenly residence, to behold and share in the glory which, he says, God had given him, although only destined for him in the divine counsels, and not yet bestowed. To show why he spoke of that as already bestowed which was only future, he adds, "for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world;" that is, thou didst intend this favour for me before the beginning of time, even from eternity. Some choose to render the latter part of the verse thus, as the original will certainly admit, "that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me before the foundation of the world, because thou lovedst me;" but it makes very little difference in point of sense, whether Christ be said to have received glory or to have been loved before the foundation of the world: both expressions are equally figurative, and imply the same thing: neither of them supposes any pre-existence.

He urges this request both for himself and them, on the ground that he was acquainted with the perfections and benevolent designs of his heavenly Father, and that his disciples had become acquainted with both from himself; while the majority of the Jews, by rejecting his message, remained in ignorance.

25. O righteous Father, the world hath not known thee; but I have known thee, and these have known that thou hast sent me.

For this reason I trust that thou wilt comply with my request in favour of my disciples, that they may

Digitized by Google

hereafter be permitted to dwell in my presence. "Righteous Father," signifies the same thing as "Benevolent Father."

He lastly mentions what more he would do, to render them worthy of this favour.

26. And I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it, that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them.

I have declared to them thy perfections and designs, and will do it more fully hereafter, when I am risen from the dead, that hereby they may become equally the objects of divine favour with myself, and that all the knowledge which I possess may dwell in them; hereby fitting and qualifying them for the work in which they are to be engaged here, and for living in my presence in heaven.

REFLECTIONS.

1. We have here a striking example of the disinterested character and humility of Christ. He speaks of his disciples as enjoying the same glory as himself, and as sent into the world in the same manner: he wishes and prays that God would manifest to the world, by the communication of miraculous powers, that they were, equally with himself, the objects of divine favour. If pride had any place in the mind of Jesus, he would have taken the opportunity of speaking to God in the presence of his disciples, to represent himself, as, what he was in fact, far superior to them, and to all former prophets and messengers of God: but he overlooks this distinction, and places himself on a level with his inferiors. Had

Digitized by Google

he been actuated by ambition, or been desirous of honour, he would have wished that the extraordinary powers which he possessed should be limited to himself, for the sake of exalting his own character. But so great is his desire of promoting the glory of God and the good of mankind, to which such gifts would be particularly subservient, that he wishes they may become universal, and that his own honours may be lost in the common honours of his followers. So little of a proud or selfish spirit was there in our master, and so little inclined was he to assume the honours of divinity, which some have supposed that he claimed.

2. While the truth is rejected by many, it is matter of consolation that there are some by whom it is received. The world, the majority of the Jewish nation, did not know God, nor acknowledge Jesus as his messenger; but there were a few whose minds were free from prejudices and open to receive the truth; and those few proved sufficient to communicate it to the rest of the world. Let not the advocates of truth in other instances be discouraged, if their followers are not numerous—a little leaven is sufficient to leaven the whole mass, and the grain of mustard seed may grow to a large tree: from causes apparently small great effects have arisen.

3. Let us learn to think and speak of the divine goodness, in bestowing particular favours upon us, as our master does; not as the effects of a sudden disposition to do good, but as arising from a fixed and settled principle, as making part of a scheme of benevolence which was planned from eternity, and was coæval with the divine existence. This is the most honourable and most just way in which we can conceive of the goodness of God, and is further recommended to us by the practice of Christ and his apostles, the divinely authorized teachers of religion.

Digitized by Google

John xviii. 1—14.

The discourses recorded in the three last chapters seem to have been delivered by Jesus after he had given the signal of rising from supper, and before he left the house; for they immediately succeed the words, Arise, let us go hence, which are followed by no intimation of his departure thence, till we enter upon this chapter. Here we find Jesus entering upon those scenes of trial and danger for which he had been preparing himself and his disciples. Let us now observe the efficacy of his instructions upon their behaviour.

1. When Jesus had spoken these words, he went forth with his disciples over the brook Cedron, where there was a garden, into the which he entered and his disciples.

This brook, which is mentioned more than once in the Old Testament, 2 Sam. xv. 23. 2 Kings xxiii. 6. descended from the mountain near Jerusalem, and ran towards the south east, through a valley of the same name, into the Dead Sea. It was over this brook that David is said to have passed, when he retired from Jerusalem to avoid his enemies, in the rebellion of Absalom. But it seems to have been mentioned here, for the sake of pointing out the situation of the garden to which Jesus retired. The place is called, by Matthew, Gethsemane. Jesus appears to have removed to this spot, for the sake of private devotion, or perhaps to afford his enemies an opportunity of apprehending him without tumult.

2. And Judas also, which betrayed

Digitized by Google

him, knew the place: for Jesus often resorted thither with his disciples.

This vindicates him from any suspicion of having retired here with a view to escape his enemies, or from motives of fear. He had often been in this place before, and might be expected to be found here now. The proprietor of the garden was probably a disciple of Jesus.

3. Judas then, having received a band of men and officers from the chief priests and Pharisees, cometh thither with lanterns and torches and weapons.

This band of men was the Roman cohort, usually stationed at the temple to preserve peace and order there, while Jerusalem was so full of inhabitants at the festival of the passover. To these were joined the officers of the Sanhedrim, which is here referred to under the names of chief priests and Pharisees; for persons of that description in the assembly were the greatest enemies to Jesus. As the soldiers acted under their authority and direction, it was proper that their officers should accompany them. By employing so large a force to apprehend Jesus, and by sending them by night, they showed what ideas they entertained of his popularity among his followers, and how much they apprehended resistance. Although it was full moon at the passover, lanterns and torches were brought, in order to identify his person, and to search him out, in case he should attempt to hide himself.

4. Jesus, therefore, knowing all things that should come upon him, *or*, "*that were coming upon him*," went forth, and said unto them, Whom seek ye?

Digitized by Google

By saying here that Jesus went forth to his enemies, knowing all things that were coming upon him, the evangelist does not mean to intimate, as his words may seem to imply, that he submitted without opposition to what he knew to be unavoidable; but that, notwithstanding he foresaw that delivering himself up into their hands would lead to a cruel crucifixion and death, yet he did it voluntarily; it was the effect of his courage and readiness to obey his Father's will, and not of blind presumption.

5. They answered him, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus saith unto them, I am he. And Judas also which betrayed him stood with them.

The situation of Judas is noticed, in order to point out his agency in the apprehension of his master, and to show that he no longer joined his disciples, but ranked himself with his enemies.

The phrase, I am he, in the Greek is, *I am*, which shows how the same phrase ought to have been rendered when it occurs, John viii. 58. where we have improperly rendered the verse, "before Abraham was I am," instead of *I am he.*

6. As soon then as he had said unto them, I am he, they went back and fell to the ground.

As many of the company were Jews, and knew that Jesus was supposed to be a prophet, they might apprehend some dreadful judgment, to befal them in an attempt to lay hold on him, such as befel the captain and the fifty men who went to seize Elijah, 2 Kings i. 10—12. This idea struck them with a sudden panic, as soon as Jesus declared himself to be the person whom they sought, and induced them to retreat, and throw themselves upon the ground in a posture of reverence. This afforded Je-

Digitized by Google

sus an easy opportunity of escaping, but, instead of taking advantage of it, he offers himself to them a second time.

7. Then asked he them again, Whom seek ye? And they said, Jesus of Nazareth.

8. Jesus answered, I have told you that I am he: if therefore, ye seek me, let these go their way;

He pointed to his disciples, whom he was desirous to exempt from suffering, although so ready to offer himself for that purpose.

9. That the saying might be fulfilled which he spoke: Of them which thou gavest me have I lost none.

These are the words of the evangelist, in which he shows how it happened that the words of Christ, mentioned John xvii. 12. came to be verified by the event, that he had lost none of his disciples by apostacy but Judas: it was owing to the care which he took to preserve them from being apprehended and exposed to temptation.

This verse may serve to show also that by the phrase, "that it might be fulfilled," which so often occurs in the evangelists, we are not to understand the fulfilment of any prediction, but merely the correspondence between the words of a prophet and a particular event; for we find the phrase used in a case where there is no pretence for supposing any prophecy.

10. Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it and smote the high priest's servant, and cut off his right ear: the servant's name was Malchus.

Digitized by Google

The reason why Peter singled out this man was that he was more forward than the rest in apprehending his master. The blow was aimed at the head, but fortunately took a less dangerous direction. This sword, with which Peter was furnished, was not provided for the present occasion, but was the common instrument of defence in travelling through a country which abounded with robbers. From Luke xxii. 38. we find that the disciples were furnished with two swords for this purpose. For one man to resist a whole band of soldiers, was indeed an act of great rashness; but it served to shew the strength of his attachment to his master.

11. Then said Jesus unto Peter, Put up thy sword into the sheath; the cup which my Father hath given me shall I not drink it?

By the cup Jesus evidently means his sufferings, and he prohibits Peter from attempting to rescue him from them, from the consideration that they were intended for him by his Father.

12. Then the band and the captain and officers of the Jews took Jesus and bound him,

The word *captain*, here used, signifies in the Greek the commander of a thousand men, and the Roman cohort, or as it is here called band, consisted generally of that number, although sometimes of much fewer.

13. And led him away to Annas first; for he was father-in-law to Caiaphas, who was the high priest that same year.

It is supposed that Annas had been high priest before his son-in-law, and that he was still regarded with so much respect as to be consulted on the pre-

Digitized by Google

sent important juncture. The high priest was appointed for life. By its being said of Caiaphas, therefore, that he was high priest that year, no more is intended than that he was in that office at that time, which John, writing some time after the event, mentions for the information of strangers*.

14. Now Caiaphas was he who gave counsel to the Jews that it was expedient that one man should die for the people.

This advice is mentioned John xi. 50. By a judge who had already given such an opinion there was little prospect of acquittal.

REFLECTIONS.

1. We have here a striking example of fortitude in danger, founded upon principle. Jesus, instead of fleeing from his enemies, or attempting to resist them, voluntarily surrenders himself into their hands, and when, through surprise or terror, they are incapable of apprehending him the first time, he offers himself a second; nor did he act thus from presumptuous ignorance, like the man who rashly exposes himself to danger because he is unacquainted with its extent. But he had, what ordinary men cannot have, a clear foresight of all that he was to suffer, and therefore, of all the consequences of the present action. All the insults and barbarities which were to fall upon his head from a malicious and bloodthirsty enemy were present to his view. The public trial, the crown of thorns, the bloody scourge, the purple robe, the fatal cross, accompanied with the taunts and reproaches of

* See Lardner's Works, Vol. i. p. 387.

Digitized by Google

brutal soldiers and more brutal scribes and Pharisees—all these things were seen by him in clear prospect, as immediately to take place, and had indeed produced a terrible conflict; but it was now over, and had left him calm and resigned, a resolute and a willing victim. What must be the benevolence of that mind which could chearfully embrace death, with all its horrors, for our benefit! What comprehension and faith, to be able to look through such sufferings to the glory that would ensue, a resurrection from the dead and the triumph of the gospel! Let us always contemplate such a character with respect and veneration, with love and gratitude.

2. Observe the piety of Jesus, exhibited in those remarkable words, The cup which my Father hath given me shall I not drink it? If any event can deserve to be called the work of man, it must be the death of Christ. The condemnation and crucifixion of so illustrious a prophet and of so excellent a character, who was perfectly harmless and inoffensive, who went about distributing benefits, could proceed only from mean jealousy of superior excellence, or from unqualified malice. But he considers it as an affliction proceeding from his Father, because it came by his permission, and was appointed to answer useful purposes in the schemes of his providence, and derives hence a motive for submitting to it without reluctance. Such is the sublime philosophy of Christianity: let us endeavour to cherish it in our minds. The afflictions of life, from whatever causes they come, will hereby lose their sting, and be regarded as the kind visitations of a friend and a father.

John xviii. 15—27.

In the preceding part of this chapter we have an account of the voluntary surrender which Jesus made of himself into the hands of those who came to apprehend him, and of the rash zeal which his disciple

Digitized by Google

Peter discovered upon the occasion. We have now a further account of the failings of that apostle, and of the composed behaviour of Jesus at his trial.

15. And Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple; that disciple was known unto the high priest, and went in with Jesus into the palace of the high priest.

16. But Peter stood at the door without. Then went out that other disciple, which was known unto the high priest, and spake unto her that kept the door, and brought in Peter.

It is generally supposed that the other disciple here mentioned, who was known to the high priest, was the writer of this history, the apostle John, and that he chose to conceal himself, from motives of modesty, under that description. But as John was only a fisherman by profession, and lived in the remote country of Galilee, it has been thought improbable by others that he should be acquainted with the high priest, and that therefore the person here referred to could not be he, but some other disciple of Jesus, of more consequence: more especially, as the denomination which John usually gives himself in other places is the disciple whom Jesus loved*.

17. Then saith the damsel that kept the door, unto Peter, Art not thou also one of this man's disciples? He saith, I am not.

This question was probably altogether unexpected by Peter, and it is likely that he was not aware of his danger till this moment. The suddenness of the

* See Pearce.

Digitized by Google

temptation, therefore, will account for his denying his master, but not excuse it. The rest of his conduct, prior to this moment, seems to manifest a greater degree of resolution than was necessary for acknowledging himself his disciple.

18. And the servants and officers stood there, who had made a fire of coals; for it was cold; and they warmed themselves; and Peter stood with them and warmed himself.

Fires for persons' warming themselves are made in Judæa and in other parts of the East by a pan of charcoal, placed in the middle of any apartment of the house. Of this nature was probably the fire here mentioned; which will account for its being made in one of the apartments of a palace.

Fire would be found in Judæa a seasonable refreshment for those who had been out all night; for, although the days are warm, the nights produce a considerable degree of cold, especially at the season of the passover.

19. The high priest then asked Jesus of his disciples and of his doctrine.

He asked him why he collected disciples together, and what doctrines he taught them in private; strongly intimating that he had some evil design in view in assembling people around him, and that what he taught in private was different from what he communicated to the world. Nothing could be more absurd and unreasonable than to propose such questions to Jesus, who appeared as a prisoner before him, brought by his authority; whom he ought, therefore, to have been ready to charge with some crime, and to support the charge by proper witnesses; instead of which he shows that he is furnished with nothing

Digitized by Google

whereof to accuse him. To such questions Jesus replies with feeling yet with firmness.

20. Jesus answered him, I spake openly to the world, I ever taught in the synagogue and in the temple, whither all* the Jews resort, and in secret have I said nothing.

That is, nothing contrary to what I have taught in public: for he often taught his disciples, and explained things to them, in private.

21. Why askest thou me? Ask them which heard me what I have said unto them; behold they know what I have said.

Jesus directs the high priest to inquire of those who heard him, what he taught, since they could give him the fullest information upon the subject, as he had used no concealment or disguise, but communicated his doctrine without reserve, in the most public places.

22. And when he had thus spoken, one of the officers who stood by struck Jesus with the palm of his hand, saying, Answerest thou the high priest so?

23. Jesus answered him, If I have spoken evil, *that is*, *disrespectfully*, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why smitest thou me?

Jesus remonstrated against the outrage which he had received, under pretence of punishing disrespect-

* See Griesbach.

Digitized by Google

ful language to the high priest, by saying that if he had answered amiss, he might have been arraigned for that offence, and obliged either to make an apology, or submit to such punishment as the law enjoined. But for a private individual to take upon himself, without authority, to punish in this manner a supposed offence, was contrary to every principle of justice.

The conduct of Jesus upon this occasion shows that the precept which he delivered in the sermon upon the mount, Matt. v. 39, "Resist not evil, but whosoever shall smite thee on the right cheek, turn to him the other also," was not intended to be taken literally, and that it means no more than that Christians, when they are ill used, should not be revengeful, and should rather bear a slight injury than seek redress, even by such methods as the law prescribes. For when smitten on one cheek, instead of turning to the officer the other, Jesus remonstrates with him on the injury committed.

24. Annas* had sent him bound unto Caiaphas the high priest.

It is supposed by many that this verse, which seems to have no connection with this part of the narrative, is out of its place, and that it originally stood after the thirteenth verse, where we are told that they led Jesus to Annas first.

25. And Simon Peter stood and warmed himself. They said therefore unto him, Art not thou also one of his disciples? He denied it, and said, I am not.

Peter still persists in his denial, hoping that he should thereby put a stop to all further questions and escape detection; but they are renewed.

* See Griesbach. Ουν, *therefore*, is omitted in many manuscripts.

Digitized by Google

26. One of the servants of the high priest, being his kinsman whose ear Peter cut off, saith, Did not I see thee in the garden with him?

Here is evidence of his relation to Jesus, which one might have thought no man could resist; for it is the testimony of one who had seen him smite with the sword a kinsman, who came to apprehend Jesus; an act which no one would perform but a friend and adherent; but even this evidence Peter can withstand.

27. Peter then denied again; and immediately the cock crew.

That is, as has been already explained, the trumpet which was used to announce the hour of the morning called the cock-crowing, was sounded. This is mentioned to show that the prediction of Jesus respecting Peter's denial was fulfilled.

REFLECTIONS.

1. These few verses furnish us with a striking example of the fortitude and composure of our master in circumstances of extreme difficulty. Although standing before the high priest, the supreme public officer among the Jews, who was accompanied on such an occasion with all the formalities of his office; although in a court of justice, deserted by his friends and encircled on every side by enemies; he is not depressed or overawed, but discovers the utmost presence of mind. When improper questions are proposed, he refuses to answer them, and shows how unreasonable they are. When he receives a violent outrage, he makes no other return than to remonstrate calmly

Digitized by Google

with the person by whom it was committed. These are circumstances which show a mind perfectly at ease, and conscious of its own innocence and dignity. Very different from this would have been his conduct had he been an impostor: we should have found him either overwhelmed with the sense of his misfortunes, or assuming an uncommon tone of arrogance from desperation; either abject or insolent. Neither of these characters belonged to Jesus; on the contrary, he displayed throughout his examination and trial that firmness which never fails to accompany virtue and integrity.

2. The conduct of Peter discovers much weakness and guilt: he who a few hours ago declared that he was ready to follow his master whithersoever he went, and to die with him; who attacked a whole band of soldiers that came to apprehend him, who followed him to the palace of the high priest, when leave had been procured him to depart without molestation; this man, who discovers so many marks of invincible courage, denies that he knew his master, upon the charge of a female, not only once but a second and a third time.

Let the most resolute Christian learn hence the folly of exposing himself to unnecessary trials: his imagined courage may forsake him in the hour of danger, and leave him stript of his virtue and his honour. Presumption is near akin to apostacy: our safety and wisdom lie in fleeing from temptation. We see how naturally vice is progressive. One deviation from the path of rectitude leads to many more, and the offender knows not where he shall stop. This is particularly the case with the vice of which Peter was guilty. One falsehood must be defended by another, and that by a third, and so on, until the transgressor has passed through a long succession of crimes. Let him, therefore, who dreads the idea of incurring guilt, be careful to avoid the first offence.

Digitized by Google

John xviii. 28. to the end.

In the last portion of this history the writer has given us some particulars of the examination and trial of Jesus before the high priest; but he has not recorded his condemnation, probably because it was related sufficiently at length in the other evangelists. He informs us now, however, that he is brought before Pilate the Roman governor, which was the consequence of his condemnation before the high priest and Jewish Sanhedrim; and relates to what took place there.

28. Then led they Jesus from Caiaphas unto the hall of judgment, *rather*, "*the prætorium*," *the name given to Pilate's house*; and it was early, and they themselves went not into the prætorium, lest they should be defiled, but that they might eat the passover.

As intercourse with Gentiles was forbidden to the Jews, the defilement here dreaded was that of being under the roof and near the person of a Roman, which, according to their apprehension, would render them impure, and unfit for joining in any of the ceremonies of religion. The feast for which they wished to preserve themselves pure was probably not the eating of paschal lamb; for that had taken place the preceding evening; but some sacrifices which accompanied it, which, however, went under the general name of the passover. As they were persons of distinction among the Jews who waited upon the governor at this time, being members of the Sanhedrim, he so far accommodated himself to their superstitious notions as to go out of his palace to hear their accusation of the prisoner.

Digitized by Google

29. Pilate then went out unto them, and said, What accusation bring ye against this man?

30. They answered and said unto him, If he were not a malefactor, we would not have delivered him up unto thee.

The question proposed by Pilate was a very proper one for a judge; but the chief priests and other members of the Sanhedrim, instead of producing specific charges against Jesus, refer to their own authority for proof of his guilt. "We think him guilty of a great crime, let that satisfy thee." It is probable, however, that they did afterwards mention some of the charges which they had to alledge against him: for something of this kind seems to be referred to in Pilate's answer.

31. Then said Pilate unto them, Take ye him and judge him according to your law.

The charges which you bring against him are not of a civil nature, nor such as I can take cognizance of, but relate to questions about your law: take him, therefore, and punish him according to that law.

The Jews, therefore, said unto him, it is not lawful for us to put any man to death;

32. That the saying of Jesus might be fulfilled, which he spake, signifying what death he should die.

Christ had signified what death he should die, when he said, John xii. 32. "And I if," or when, "I am lifted up from the earth will draw all men unto me."

Digitized by Google

What made this prediction remarkable, and the fulfilment of it worthy of being noticed by the evangelist, was that he should have been able to foretel that he should die by crucifixion, a Roman punishment, and not by a natural death or in a tumult, either of which appeared more probable*. From the Jews' saying that it was not lawful for them to put any man to death, it appears that the power of life and death was in the hands of the Romans, and that the Jews at this time had lost their political independence; a state of subjection to which they had never before been reduced in their own country, and fully verifying the celebrated prediction of Jacob, The sceptre shall not depart from Judah until Shiloh come. The high priest, indeed, with the assistance of the council, was allowed to try men for less offences, and to inflict such punishment as their laws enjoined; but in cases where the life of the offender was concerned, the cause must have a hearing before the Roman governor, who alone could pronounce sentence of death. This was the reason of their bringing Jesus to him, after having pronounced him worthy of death, in their own court.

33. Then Pilate entered into the prætorium again, and called Jesus, and said unto him, Art thou the king of the Jews?

It was one of the charges brought against him by his enemies, that he said he was Christ, a king. Pilate, therefore, asks him this question, to know whether he really claimed that character: for he should then have some plea for condemning and punishing him.

34. Jesus answered him, Sayest thou this thing of thyself, or did others tell it thee of me?

* Lardner's Works, Vol. i. p. 49.

Digitized by Google

By this question Jesus intended to set Pilate upon his guard: a Roman governor, jealous of the rights of his master, could not fail to hear of a claim to supreme power, if any such had been advanced by an inhabitant of Judæa; but if he had never claimed it till this time, and the information came from his enemies, it was not likely to be true and deserved very little attention.

35. Pilate answered, Am I a Jew? Thine own nation and the chief priests have delivered thee to me. What hast thou done?

That is, canst thou suppose that I am acquainted with thy character and pretensions from my own knowledge, who am not a native of the country, and know nothing of thee but what I learn from thy countrymen, and those the principal men in the nation? By what means hast thou so grievously offended them?

36. Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world.

My kingdom is of a spiritual and not of a civil nature, and cannot, therefore, interfere with the Roman government.

If my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, "*then would my servants have contended*," that I should not be delivered to the Jews; so that my kingdom is not from hence.

Had my kingdom been of a civil nature, my disciples would have had instructions to support it, in the same way in which other kingdoms are supported, by force of arms; but I have been followed by multitudes of persons, for the most part unarmed, and when I was apprehended, those who were inclined to

Digitized by Google

defend me by force were forbidden to do it; it is plain, therefore, that my kingdom is not of a temporal nature.

37. Pilate, therefore, said unto him, Thou art a king then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king, *i. e. thou sayest truly.* To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth.

For this purpose I was brought into being and appeared in public as a divine messenger, to bear testimony to the truth, or to the true religion.

Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice.

Every friend to truth attends to my instructions.

38. Pilate saith unto him, What is truth?

That is, What is truth to me? Speculative points of debate are no concern of mine as a judge. That this is the meaning of his question, is evident from his not waiting for an answer, which he would have done if he had asked for information.

And when he had said this, he went out again unto the Jews, and said unto them, I find in him no fault at all.

This he said because he had discovered that the kingly power which Jesus claimed was wholly of a spiritual nature, and as to truth, he gave himself no concern about it.

39. But ye have a custom that I release unto you one at the passover;

Digitized by Google

will ye, therefore, that I release unto you the king of the Jews?

This custom probably originated with the Roman government, in order to render themselves popular; for we read nothing of it in the law of Moses.

40. Then cried they all again, saying, Not this man, but Barabbas. Now Barabbas was a robber.

In the other evangelists he is called a murderer; he might be both.

REFLECTIONS.

1. We may observe how consistent a scrupulous exactness in the observance of religious ceremonies is with the perpetration of the greatest crimes. These chief priests, Pharisees and scribes were so anxious to keep themselves from the mere possibility of defilement, and to be in a constant state of preparation for religious services, that they will not so much as come under the roof of a heathen: yet at the same time they were persecuting to death, with relentless malice, an innocent and exalted character and an eminent prophet, who was guilty of no other crime than that of being better than themselves, and of exposing their faults with freedom and severity. Thus they showed that superstition and cruelty may be united in the same person, and that all the forms of religion may be strictly observed, where there is no portion of its spirit. Merciless and detestable hypocrites! Justly did Jesus say of you that ye paid tithe of mint and cummin, while ye neglected the weightier matters of the law, judgment, truth and mercy; that ye strained at a gnat and swallowed a camel; that ye were whited sepul-

Digitized by Google

chres; fair indeed without, but within full of rottenness and corruption; a brood of vipers!

From the example of these men let us learn the little value of external observances, when compared with genuine piety and substantial virtue, and direct our principal attention to the latter rather than to the former.

2. Let us ever keep in mind the account which Christ here gives of the nature of his kingdom—that it is not of this world. It came not from man, but from God; it is founded on future prospects, and consists in the empire of truth over the minds and consciences of men. Had men been attentive to this maxim, they would not have attempted to produce obedience to its laws by temporal rewards, nor to punish those who violate them by temporal penalties: for they are contrary to its nature and destroy its essence. Human laws govern by compulsion, and where they have produced an external conformity require no more: those of the gospel, by love, and deem no services of any value, which proceed not from the heart. Had men been attentive to this maxim, that Christ's kingdom is not of this world, that union between the Christian religion and the civil power which has subsisted in so many countries and for so many ages, and which every where corrupts the purity of the gospel, would never have taken place; for they would have been found incompatible with each other's prosperity. To hold out worldly honours and riches, as the reward of religious services, had a natural tendency to fill the church with men of worldly and ambitious views, who had no other object in coming into it than that of enriching and aggrandizing themselves, and would pay no regard to the interests of religion. While, on the other hand, those who were thus enriched and honoured would be zealous in supporting that form of government from which they received such benefits, however corrupt it might be.

Digitized by Google

3. Let us remember the importance of religious truth. To promote it, was the great object for which Christ was born and came into the world. The miracles which he wrought, the discourses which he delivered, his excellent example and unparalleled sufferings, were only different methods of bearing testimony to the truth; of showing its reasonable nature; of illustrating its superior excellence, and of establishing its divine origin. What has thus been communicated to the world at so much cost, let us learn to regard with the deepest veneration, and to prize as of the highest value. Let us show our love of the truth by inquiring after it with diligence, by professing it without reserve when discovered, by defending it with fortitude and propagating it with zeal. There cannot be a nobler employment than that of being devoted to the service of truth; it was the employment of our master, for which he was born, and in performing which he lived and died. Of courage in professing the truth he has given on the present occasion a noble example, by acknowledging himself to be the Messiah or king of the Jews; thus witnessing before Pilate a good confession.

4. Let us rejoice in the fresh evidence which we have of the innocence of Christ's character. The methods which are taken to asperse it only make it shine with greater lustre. After all that his enemies, actuated by the bitterest malice, can say against him, Pilate the Roman governor, and, in this instance at least, an impartial judge, acknowledges that he can find no fault in him.

John xix. 1—18.

Pilate, having declared Jesus to be innocent, endeavours to save him from the punishment of death, which the Jews wished to have inflicted; but, with the view of preserving the good will of these Jewish rulers, by gratifying their wishes in some degree, he

Digitized by Google

orders Jesus to be scourged, arrayed with the mock ensigns of royalty, and after being insulted and abused by the soldiers, brought forth to his enemies; hoping that when they saw him thus punished and degraded, their malice would be satisfied: but in this he found himself disappointed.

1. Then Pilate therefore took Jesus and scourged him.

It appears that the Romans used to scourge malefactors before they were crucified; but this punishment seems to have been inflicted upon Jesus by the order of Pilate for a different purpose; merely to satiate the malice of his enemies, that they might the more readily consent to his release; for Luke tells us, xxiii. 16. that Pilate said, willing to save Jesus, I will therefore chastise him and release him.

2. And the soldiers platted a crown of thorns, and put it on his head, and they put on him a purple robe; *Matthew calls it a scarlet robe.*

3. And said, Hail, king of the Jews: and they smote him with their hands.

The word which we render thorns, also signifies a particular herb which is called acanthus; and it is the opinion of a judicious critic that the crown which Jesus wore upon the present occasion was made of this herb, and intended, like the purple robe and the reed, for derision, and not to give him pain*. The scourging and blows, however, show that his enemies were as much inclined to injure as to insult him.

4. Pilate, therefore, went forth a-

* Bishop Pearce.

Digitized by Google

gain, and saith unto them, Behold I bring him forth to you, that ye may know I find no fault in him.

5. Then came Jesus forth, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe, and Pilate saith unto them, Behold the man.

Behold the man whom you accuse of claiming kingly power, treated in a manner becoming the absurdity of his pretensions, clothed with the ensigns of royalty, the object of scorn and derision. He thought that to behold him thus humbled and degraded would have been sufficient to satisfy their utmost malice.

6. When the chief priests, therefore, and officers saw him, they cried out, saying, Crucify him, crucify him.

They were afraid that the people would begin to relent, when they saw Jesus thus humbled and degraded, and therefore directed them what to ask for, by calling out for his crucifixion.

Pilate saith unto them, Take ye him and crucify him: for I find no fault in him.

If this wickedness be committed, it must be done by yourselves: I cannot do it: for I think him innocent, and have already punished him as much and more than he deserves.

7. The Jews answered him, We have a law; and by our law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God.

Digitized by Google

The evangelist Matthew tells us, xxvi. 63. that Jesus, being adjured by the high priest to declare whether he were the Christ, the Son of God, answered in the affirmative; upon which the high priest accused him of blasphemy, and, together with the rest of the council, adjudged him worthy of death. For blasphemy was by their law a capital crime: see Lev. xxiv. 16. and it is to this law that they now refer.

8. When Pilate, therefore, heard that saying, he was the more afraid;

What increased Pilate's fear of condemning him was the account which he had just heard, that Jesus professed himself to be the Son of God; supposing him hence to be some extraordinary person, like the heroes and demigods of the heathens, who were derived by natural descent from one of their divinities. To satisfy his curiosity upon this subject, he brings him back into the court of judgment.

9. And went again into the prætorium, and saith unto Jesus, Whence art thou? *From whom descended, or by whom commissioned?* But Jesus gave him no answer.

He had already said what was sufficient to explain the nature of his kingdom and to prove his innocence. To have entered into a formal defence of himself or into a minute history of his life, when it might have been so easily obtained from others, did not become him. At this conduct, however, Pilate testifies some displeasure.

10. Then saith Pilate unto him, Speakest thou not unto me? Knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee?

Digitized by Google

11. Jesus answered, Thou couldst have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above*, therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin.

Thou couldst have no power over me, unless it had been given to thee by Divine Providence for important purposes. For had I not known that it was the will of Heaven that I should be delivered up to thee, I could have rescued myself out of thy hands by the exertion of my miraculous powers. The words that follow do not relate to what is said in this verse, but to what is said in the preceding, and the meaning is, therefore, that is, because they have delivered me into the hands of one who has power to put me to death, the chief priests and scribes are so much the more criminal.

This language confirmed Pilate in the opinion which he entertained of the innocence of Jesus, and induced him to make a fresh attempt to save him.

12. And from thenceforth, *or, rather,* "*then,*" *for this was not the first time of his attempting to do it*; Pilate sought to release him; but the Jews cried out, saying, If thou let this man go thou art not Cæsar's friend; whosoever maketh himself a king speaketh against Cæsar.

This was the strongest argument that they could employ: they threaten to accuse him of disaffection to the emperor Tiberias, who was a jealous tyrant and would punish with the utmost severity those who

* Wakefield would translate, "from the beginning," and refers to Acts ii. 23. See his note.

Digitized by Google

were not careful to preserve his prerogatives, if he did not consent to the crucifixion of Jesus. This argument immediately decided the conduct of the wavering governor.

13. When Pilate, therefore, heard that saying, he brought Jesus forth, and sat down on the judgment seat, in a place that is called the pavement, but in the Hebrew, Gabbatha.

Roman governors and commanders used to pass sentence upon criminals, and to harangue their soldiers, from a throne placed upon a raised pavement of marble in the open air. To such a place, the evangelist tells us, Pilate now resorted, for the purpose of passing sentence upon Jesus. Such circumstances may appear to some too trivial for notice; but they are of importance, as furnishing a fresh proof that the history is genuine; for genuine histories abound with such particularities of time and place.

14. And it was the preparation of the passover and about the sixth hour.

As the passover was now over, having been celebrated on the preceding evening by Jesus and his disciples, this day could not be the preparation for it. It has therefore been supposed that the word passover in this verse is an interpolation, although it cannot be proved to be so by the authority of manuscripts, and that the evangelist wrote originally the word *preparation* only, meaning thereby the day before the sabbath, on which the Jews used to prepare for the sabbath*. It is so called by the other evangelists, and in the thirty-first verse of this chapter. Instead of the sixth hour many manuscripts read the third

* See Pearce and Mann. Wakefield renders *the preparation of the paschal sabbath*, which after all is perhaps the best mode of interpretation.

Digitized by Google

hour*, or nine o'clock of our time, which will better correspond with the account given in the other evangelists.

And he saith unto the Jews, Behold your king.

By this language he seems to have tried once more to save him; but it only made his enemies the more violent.

15. But they cried out, Away with him! Away with him! Crucify him! Pilate saith unto them, Shall I crucify your king? The chief priests answered, We have no king but Cæsar.

16. Then delivered he him, therefore, unto them to be crucified; and they took Jesus and led him away.

17. And he bearing his cross, went forth into a place called the place of a skull, which is called in the Hebrew, Golgotha,

18. Where they crucified him and two others with him, on either side one, and Jesus in the midst.

Although Jesus was delivered to the Jews, the execution of the sentence was not wholly entrusted to them; but a band of Roman soldiers attended. It was usual, on these occasions, to make the criminal carry his own cross, and John tells us expressly that Jesus bore his cross; but as the other evangelists say that Simon the Cyrenian was compelled to carry it

* Griesbach.

Digitized by Google

for him, it is probable that Jesus fainted under the load, weakened as he must be by his previous sufferings, and that then they laid it upon this stranger. The spot where he was crucified was the common place of execution, now usually called Calvary, which signifies the same thing in Latin as Golgotha does in the Syro-Chaldaic language. As the circumstance of his being crucified between two malefactors is mentioned, it was probably intended as an insult, and so ordered by the request of his enemies, to intimate that he was the greatest offender of the three.

REFLECTIONS.

1. The passage which we have been reading furnishes us with fresh reasons to admire both the meekness and the dignity of Jesus. Although cruelly scourged and barbarously insulted, while no crime was proved against him, yea, while he was declared to be innocent, we read of no complaint which he uttered or remonstrance which he made against the injustice of such treatment; much less of any miracle which he wrought to punish his enemies. We hear of no angry retorts to the bitter sarcasms of his enemies; but the whole was borne with meek and patient fortitude: hereby he manifested a complete self command and entire resignation to the will of God, whose design it was that he should suffer. So justly did Peter, one of his disciples, say of him that being reviled he reviled not again; when he suffered he threatened not, but committed himself to him who judgeth righteously.

Difficult as it might be to maintain silence in such circumstances, it was still more difficult in those in which he was next placed; when his enemies were urgent to have him condemned; when his judge ap-

Digitized by Google

peared reluctant to do it, and his life depended upon the issue. What stronger inducements could he have to speak? Had he then exerted those powers of eloquence which he possessed in so eminent a degree, and which had so often moved the multitudes which followed him; had he enlarged upon the innocence of his past life, upon the many beneficent miracles which he had performed, and the many divine communications which he had received; had he dwelt upon the honour of protecting innocence against the designs of malice, and the infamy of condemning the faultless and meritorious character, and attempted hereby to confirm the wavering resolution of the governor; should we say that he had done any more than was natural, and what the love of life compelled him to do? But nothing of this kind do we hear from the lips of Jesus. He says enough, indeed, to show his innocence, but takes no pains to prove or enforce it; much less does he attempt to gain the favour of his judge by flattering compliments. Conscious of the uprightness of his intentions and the blamelessness of his character, he leaves both his friends and his enemies to judge of him, as their consciences or inclinations might direct; in this manifesting the utmost dignity and propriety of behaviour. An eager desire of life, or an anxious concern to vindicate himself, would not have become his exalted character.

2. The conduct of Pilate upon the present occasion may show us the folly and the danger of yielding to popular clamour. To preserve himself from the imputation of not being Cæsar's friend, he condemns to death an innocent person and most distinguished character. To avoid a little temporary disgrace, from which he would soon have been able to clear himself, he incurs eternal infamy. Such has been the usual fate of those who have preferred their present interest and the applause of men to the rules of justice and the approbation of God. Let us resolve to do whatever conscience may dictate, without regard to the consequences, whether they be favourable to our reputation and interest or otherwise; which is in fact the best

Digitized by Google

way to secure lasting fame; for, although our characters may suffer for a while, we may safely leave it to time, and to the good sense of mankind, to do justice to our motives.

John xix. 19—30.

In the last section we left Jesus nailed to the cross: we are now called to attend to his dying behaviour upon it.

19. And Pilate wrote a title and put it on the cross: and the writing was, Jesus of Nazareth, the king of the Jews.

After what we have read of the reluctance of Pilate to condemn Jesus upon this charge, no one can suppose that he was at last convinced that it was well founded, and that on that account he ordered him to be crucified and to have this inscription upon his cross. But as it was customary with the Romans to put some title, he chose to put one that contained the crime imputed to Jesus, although he thought him innocent.

20. This title then read many of the Jews; for the place where Jesus was crucified was nigh to the city, and it was written in Hebrew and Greek and Latin.

Jerusalem, at the time of the passover, was resorted to by Jews of every nation: this made it necessary to have the inscription in different languages; in such, at least, as were generally spoken.

21. Then said the chief priests of

Digitized by Google

the Jews to Pilate, Write not "the king of the Jews;" but that he said, I am king of the Jews.

The words of the inscription might imply that Jesus was acknowledged by the Jews as their king, in which case his crucifixion might be regarded as an insult to the whole Jewish nation. The chief priests, therefore, desire him to alter it, but without success.

22. Pilate answered, What I have written I have written.

What I have written I will not change: he probably thought that altering the inscription would detract from his dignity, and therefore refused to comply.

23. Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took his garments, *his outward garment or cloak*, and made four parts, to every soldier a part, *the cloak was formed of four parts*; and also his coat, *an under garment or waistcoat, without sleeves:* now the coat, "*the vest,*" was without seam, woven from the top throughout.

This garment, so curiously wrought, was probably the present of some friend, who took this method of expressing his respect for the character of Jesus.

24. They said, therefore, among themselves, Let us not rend it, but cast lots for it whose it shall be; that the scripture might be fulfilled which saith, They parted my raiment among them, and for my vesture they did cast

Digitized by Google

lots. These things therefore the soldiers did.

These words are found in Ps. xxii. 18. and are applied by David to his enemies, who were so set upon spoil, and so sure of his destruction, that they cast lots for his garments before they had overcome him. I have already had occasion to observe to you that the words, "that the scripture might be fulfilled," are not to be understood as asserting that the words of scripture referred to were originally delivered as a prophecy of the event to which they are applied, but, that being originally intended for something else, they may, by way of accommodation, be applied to this: just as if he had said, thus the words of scripture are fulfilled. If any one, however, thinks that the words quoted cannot with any propriety be applied to the enemies of David, he will consider them as intended for the enemies of Christ and as prophetic of their temper.

25. Now there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene.

Matthew says that they stood afar off, yet it appears that they were not so far off as not to be within sight.

26. When Jesus, therefore, saw his mother and the disciple standing by whom he loved, *the apostle John*, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son, *him to whom thou art to look for protection and support.*

27. Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother.

Behold her to whom thou art to behave with the tenderness and respect due to one in that relation.

Digitized by Google

From this story it has been justly concluded that Joseph, the husband of Mary and the father of Jesus, was now dead; for Mary would not otherwise have stood in need of any other protection. It may also, I think, be inferred that our Lord's brethren did not believe in him; for if they had, and had been his disciples, there would have been no occasion to recommend their mother to a stranger. We are not surprised to find that a recommendation from such a quarter proved successful.

And from that hour, "*from that time*," that disciple took her unto his own home.

28. After this Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst.

This thirst was the natural consequence of a great loss of blood and of the fatigue which he had undergone, as well before he was crucified as after that event. The evangelist, however, tells us that Jesus did not utter these words to complain of his sufferings; for had he been disposed to complain he had something more grievous to mention; but with the expectation that he should give occasion hereby to the fulfilment of a certain prophecy relating to himself, which expectation was founded upon the fulfilment of many other prophecies in his own person. The words, knowing that all things were accomplished, are not to be understood as if every prediction respecting Jesus had already been accomplished, for there were some predictions on the subject of his resurrection, which had not yet taken place, and the prophecy here referred to must be allowed, at that time at least, to be unfulfilled; but they are to be taken generally, and with some limitation, so as to imply that most of the predictions which related to the character which he

Digitized by Google

should maintain while on earth were fulfilled, and that this would complete their number.

29. Now there was set a vessel full of vinegar, and they filled a spunge with vinegar, and put it upon hyssop, *that is, fastened it to a twig of that plant,* and put it to his mouth.

The liquor given to Jesus to drink upon the cross is supposed by Dr. Lardner to be vinegar and water, the common liquor of the Roman soldiers, and brought here for their use while they watched over the body. This Jesus received, though he had refused the potion of vinegar and myrrh or gall, mentioned by Matthew xxvii. 34. which was probably offered to him as a stupifying draught.

30. When Jesus, therefore, had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished; and he bowed his head and gave up the ghost, *or, as it would be better rendered,* " *expired.*"

The English words, gave up the ghost, seem to imply that Jesus dismissed his spirit, and that his doing so was voluntary; but the expressions in the original convey no such idea, and are no other than what are used to express the dying of other persons, and are equivalent to the phrases *expiring*, or *breathing the last*, in our own language. The bowing of the head was an involuntary act, and a symptom of death. It appears, however, that Jesus retained possession of his faculties to the last; for the preceding moment, having received the vinegar, he said, It is finished; meaning hereby, My sufferings are ended; I am about to be delivered from them.

Digitized by Google

REFLECTIONS.

1. We are here called to witness the last instance of the patience and fortitude of Jesus: dreadful indeed was the cup which he had now to drink; shame and pain and death in the worst form. No wonder that he was agitated and appalled by the prospect of such sufferings; no wonder that he prayed so earnestly that they might pass from him. He must have been something superior to human nature, if he could have beheld them with indifference. But when the hour of trial arrives, although his pains must have tortured him to agony, although they were increasing in violence, till death put an end to them; yet not a word of reproach upon his enemies, not a murmur against the wisdom or justice of Providence, falls from his lips; he is perfectly calm and resigned while hanging upon the cross, and can attend to the wants of others as well as his own: happy are they who can say, as Christ does, that their sufferings are finished, without cause for self reproach; who have passed through a long course of bodily pain or sickness, without having their minds disturbed or their patience exhausted. It is a proof of no small attainment in virtue. It is a pledge of no inconsiderable reward.

2. The crucifixion of Christ affords an instructive example of affection between friends. It is much to the honour of John that he followed his master to the cross, when deserted by the rest of his disciples; but it is more to the honour of these women that they followed him in the like circumstances: shocking to the feelings of a mother was the spectacle which Mary beheld; a beloved son, endeared to her by natural affection, and still more by every quality which is great and excellent, suspended by nails to a cross, dying by the lingering tortures of crucifixion, and the object of

Digitized by Google

scorn and reproach to all that passed by. She was surely actuated by something more than natural affection, when she could desire to witness such a sight; by a principle of religion and a sense of duty; by a desire to bear testimony to the unblemished character and divine mission of a slandered and persecuted prophet. This induced her to stifle the feelings of nature, and to disregard the scorn of the multitude, while she resolved to attend her son in the last moments of life.

Deservedly was this instance of courage and attachment repaid by the attention of Jesus. Behold thy mother, says he to his beloved disciple. There is an incomparable delicacy and propriety in these words; to have said more, would have wounded the feelings of a friend. A word or a look from such a quarter had all the force of command. Can we help admitting the benevolence of Jesus, who, while tortured with the agonies of crucifixion, can forget his own sufferings, to think of the forlorn condition of an aged and unprotected parent? Let children learn hence that they are bound to provide for their parents, when old and unable to provide for themselves: this is no more than a common return of gratitude for favours received from them in their tender years; and hard and unfeeling must be the man who will do nothing to shelter the infirmities of those who have so often sheltered his own. This is a duty reasonable in itself, and sanctioned by the example of the Saviour, the last moments of whose life were occupied in performing it.

3. The death and crucifixion of Christ may teach us not to judge of men by their external circumstances. The greatest prophet and most excellent character whom the world ever beheld, was a person of mean origin and destitute circumstances; was apprehended, tried, condemned and crucified, as the vilest malefactor. The greatest friend of the human race is treated as their greatest enemy: the Son of God and favorite of Heaven, as a blasphemer. Let us

Digitized by Google

learn hence to form our opinions of men's characters from their temper and behaviour, and not from the treatment which they meet with from the world. Judging by this rule, we shall often find merit where we least expected it, and discover that many of those who have been persecuted and put to death by the powers of this world, were the honours of human nature and the benefactors of mankind.

John xix. 31. to the end.

31. The Jews, therefore, because it was the preparation, *that is, for the sabbath*, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the sabbath day; (for that sabbath was a high day;) besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away.

The punishment of crucifixion, although a very painful was not a speedy death; for it frequently happened that the criminal lingered a long time upon the cross, sometimes three days and even five. The law of the Jews, however, did not permit them to expose, for so long a time as a night, a criminal who had been executed, but required that he should be taken down and buried the same day. Deut. xxi. 22, 23. To suffer him to remain there a longer time, they are told, would defile the land. To prevent this violation of their law upon the present occasion, especially on so solemn day as that which was approaching, a sabbath which fell in the days of unleavened bread, they requested Pilate that the persons crucified might have their legs broken, that the fresh effusion of blood brought on by this violence might more speedily produce death. The preparation for the sabbath was a

Digitized by Google

few hours before it commenced, from three o'clock in the afternoon till six, in which time the Jews used to lay aside their usual occupations, in order to prepare for that solemnity. The reason why it is here mentioned is not because they considered the sanctity of that time violated by the person's hanging upon the cross, but because its arrival reminded them of the approach of the sabbath.

32. Then came the soldiers, and brake the legs of the first and of the other which was crucified with him:

33. But when they came to Jesus, and saw that he was dead already, they brake not his legs.

34. But one of the soldiers with a spear, pierced his side, and forthwith came thereout blood and water.

This action of the soldier was intended to accomplish with certainty what seemed to be already effected, and, no doubt, would have produced death, if it had not yet taken place. The water which accompanied the blood, some suppose to come from the pericardium, a membrane which surrounds the heart, and in which there is a small quantity of this fluid. But others, thinking that this quantity of water in the pericardium is too inconsiderable to produce the effect here mentioned, have supposed that it came from the thorax, in which, we are told, a great quantity of serum, that is, of the watry part of the blood, is found when a person dies of torture, as Christ did.

35. And he that saw it bare record that ye might believe, and his record is true, and he knoweth that he saith true.

Digitized by Google

I have changed the order of the words in this verse, in order to render the meaning more clear. The writer, although he uses the third person, is generally understood to speak of himself, and to assert that, having been an eye-witness of the fact, he could affirm it with certainty. As it was of importance to ascertain the resurrection, and consequently the death of Jesus, the evangelist drops his narrative, in order to give the evidence for it.

36. For these things were done that the scripture should be fulfilled, A bone of him shall not be broken.

The passage of scripture here referred to, Ex. xii. 46. is nothing more than the direction given the Jews respecting the manner in which the paschal lamb was to be eaten; in doing it a bone of him was not to be broken. Not the slightest intimation is given that this prohibition was enjoined in order to render this lamb a type of Christ; which furnishes us with a proof, as well as many other instances, that passages in the Old Testament are applied to Christ and to the Christian dispensation by way of accommodation, and that the words, that the scriptures might be fulfilled, do not always imply the accomplishment of the prediction, but merely a correspondence between the words of scripture and the event to which it is applied.

37. And again another scripture saith, They shall look on him whom they pierced.

These words, as used by the prophet Zechariah, are applied to the Supreme Being in a metaphorical sense, who is said to be pierced or wounded, because he was ill treated by the Jews. When applied, therefore, to the piercing of Christ's side with a spear, it can only be by way of accommodation; just in the same manner as the passage in the preceding verse.

Digitized by Google

38. And after this Joseph of Arimathea, being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, besought Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus, and Pilate gave him leave: he came, therefore, and took the body of Jesus.

In relating this transaction, the evangelist Mark tells us that Pilate, being surprised to hear that Jesus was so soon dead, sent to inquire of the centurion who had the care of the execution whether it were as was reported, and, being assured by him of the fact, then complied with Joseph's request; a circumstance which renders the death of Jesus more unquestionable, if possible, than before.

39. And there came also Nicodemus, which at the first came to Jesus by night, and brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about an hundred pounds weight.

It appears from Josephus that the higher the honour intended for the dead, the greater was the quantity of spices employed; we know also that the body was not only embalmed, but likewise buried in spices, and that it was not unusual to burn a certain portion of them. We need not, therefore, be surprised at the quantity used on this occasion, when we learn from the same authority that eighty pounds of spices were expended in the burial of Gamaliel the elder, a Jewish Rabbi. This was a testimony of respect to Jesus worthy of the wealth and the attachment of Nicodemus*.

40. Then took they, *Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus*, the body of

* Harmer's Observations, Vol. ii. p. 156, 164. Lardner's Works, Vol. i. p. 163. Bishop Pearce.

Digitized by Google

Jesus, and wound it in linen clothes with the spices, as the manner of the Jews is to bury.

From this passage, as well as from others which have occurred in the course of the history, it appears that John wrote his gospel for the instruction of strangers, or Gentiles; for Gentiles only could want to be informed in what manner it was usual for the Jews to bury. The reason for mentioning the linen clothes with which he was bound will be seen, when the evangelist comes to speak of his resurrection.

41. Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new sepulchre, wherein was never man yet laid.

This garden belonged to Joseph, and the sepulchre had been hewn out of the rock, as a repository for himself or his family. It was natural to observe that it had never yet been used, as no one could then suspect that it was the body of some other person, and not of Jesus, which rose to life again.

42. There laid they Jesus, therefore, because of the Jews' preparation-day; for the sepulchre was nigh at hand.

The Jewish sabbath began at six o'clock of our Friday evening, and the preparation for it at three in the afternoon of the same day, at which time Jesus expired. As he remained some time upon the cross after he was dead, a considerable portion of the period of the preparation must now have elapsed. Had his friends, therefore, attempted to remove Jesus to any distance, the sabbath would have commenced before they could have accomplished their purpose. They chose, therefore, to bury him in a sepulchre which was

Digitized by Google

near at hand, rather than incur the hazard of violating the sabbath, by carrying him to one at a remote distance.

REFLECTIONS.

1. We may observe from this part of the history, how undeniable is the evidence of the death of Jesus. It satisfies his friends, who waited for the event with affectionate solicitude, to perform for him the last office of friendship. It satisfies his enemies, who never would have quitted him until they saw their malicious purposes completely executed. It satisfies the Roman soldiers, who were accustomed to executions and well acquainted with the symptoms of death. An event believed by so many persons of opposite wishes, upon the testimony of their senses, who had such strong motives to inquire into it, must be allowed to be true. There is nothing to excite suspicion or surmise. It has every mark of authority which we can desire. This consideration serves completely to justify the conduct of Providence in permitting Jesus to die in so painful and ignominious a manner. A public execution was necessary to ascertain his death beyond all contradiction, and consequently to prove his resurrection from the dead, which was dependent upon it. Had he died of a natural disease in private, his death could not have been so well known; a suspicion might have remained in the minds of many that his death was pretended and not real; but nothing of this kind can now be supposed. Here then lies the mystery of the cross, which men have endeavoured in so many ways to explain: it was necessary to establish the truth of Christ's resurrection; the most interesting and important event which ever took place in the world. A great evil, but of a temporary nature, is endured by an innocent individual, in order to produce a much greater good, the belief of a resurrection from the dead.

Digitized by Google

2. The conduct of Joseph and Nicodemus, in showing respect to the person of their master after death, the one by requesting his body of the Roman governor for interment, the other, by bringing a large quantity of spices to embalm him, is highly worthy of commendation. It was the generous dictate of friendship, which teaches to respect in the dead the person that was loved and esteemed while living. It was also intended as a public, though silent, testimony to his innocence and worth, in opposition to the calumnies and ill treatment of his enemies. Him whom the Jewish council had condemned as guilty of blasphemy, and the Roman governor as an enemy to Cæsar, these two men are resolved to honour, not only as a person of exemplary piety and unsullied purity, but as a distinguished prophet and favorite of Heaven. As far as in them lies, they will wipe away the stain which has been thrown upon his character.

Blessed are they who, to rescue injured and departed merit from reproach, can thus step forwards in the face of public opinion, and, at the hazard of their own reputation, if it be only by the silent language of actions; but more blessed are they who have the resolution to defend the innocent, and to oppose the counsels of the wicked, by their words. Verily they shall not lose their reward in this life. They shall find friends who will do for them what they have done for others; who, when they are laid in the grave, and are no longer able to defend themselves, will be ready to vindicate their memory from reproach, and to do justice to their merit; or, if not recompenced here, they shall certainly be recompenced at the resurrection of the just.

John xx. 1—18.

In the last chapter we left Jesus in the tomb, being committed to that place by his friends, who saw that he was dead and never once entertained the thought of

Digitized by Google

his being restored to life. We are now called to witness the evidence of his being miraculously raised from the dead.

This account appears to vary in many particulars from that given by some other of the evangelists. But I have not thought it necessary to reconcile their different narratives, or to render them consistent. Such variations and oppositions in inconsiderable instances are frequently found in authentic histories, without destroying their authority. As John, however, was an eye-witness of many things, and wrote after the rest, I conceive that, where there is any opposition, his authority ought rather to be preferred.

1. The first day of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early, when it was yet dark, unto the sepulchre, and seeth the stone taken away from the sepulchre.

Being ignorant of what Nicodemus had done, she came with her companions to embalm the body with spices, as soon as the rest of the sabbath and the darkness of the night would permit.

2. Then she runneth, and cometh to Simon Peter and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, *that is, John, the evangelist*, and saith unto them, They have taken away our master out of the sepulchre, and we know not where they have laid him.

She expected to learn something about this supposed transaction from them; but they were as ignorant of it and as much surprised as herself.

3. Peter, therefore, went forth and that other disciple, and came to the sepulchre.

Digitized by Google

4. So they ran both together, and the other disciple did outrun Peter and came first to the sepulchre.

5. And he, stooping down and looking in, saw the linen clothes lying, yet went he not in.

He was struck with what he saw, but he wished to have another witness of the state of things in the sepulchre, before he entered, lest he might be suspected of having caused some changes himself; he went not in therefore before his companion arrived.

6. Then cometh Simon Peter, following him, and went into the sepulchre, and seeth the linen clothes lie;

7. And the napkin that had been about his head, not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself.

The linen clothes and the napkin were what had been employed by Nicodemus to wrap the spices round the body of Jesus. The situation in which they were found is mentioned to show that the body had been removed more deliberately than could be expected from thieves, who would have been in haste to execute their purpose. These circumstances satisfied John that he was raised from the dead; an event, however, which he did not expect before, because he had not understood the scriptures which foretold it.

8. Then went in also that other disciple which came first to the sepulchre; and he saw and believed.

That is, in Christ's resurrection; his faith in that event commenced from this time and not before.

Digitized by Google

9. For as yet they, *that is, the disciples,* knew not the scripture that he must rise again from the dead.

Till this time none of them understood the prophecies which predicted his resurrection.

10. Then the disciples went away again unto their own home.

Not each to his own house, as the words seem to imply, but to some common place of resort; for we find them all assembled together in the evening, verse the nineteenth. To have remained at the tomb, might have exposed them to suspicion and danger. From a regard to their own safety, therefore, they retired; but Mary had no such fears, and hoped, by remaining there, to obtain some intelligence respecting her master.

11. But Mary stood without at the sepulchre, weeping, and as she wept, she stooped down and looked into the sepulchre,

12. And seeth two angels in white raiment sitting, the one at the head and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain;

13. And they say unto her, Woman, Why weepest thou? She saith unto them, Because they have taken away my master, and I know not where they have laid him.

The design of this appearance of angels in the tomb of Jesus, seems to have been to point out the miraculous agency of the Divine Being in raising him from

Digitized by Google

the dead. The white colour of their garments probably arose from the light which was emitted from them; for it is said of Christ, when he was transfigured on the mount, that his raiment was white and glistering from a like cause. By the reply which Mary made to their question, it would appear as if she at first considered them as no more than ordinary persons, although she afterwards saw reason to think otherwise. The question, Why weepest thou? may be regarded as a mild reproof, as if they had said, Thou hast no occasion for thy sorrow; he for whom thou weepest is alive, and stands behind thee.

14. And when she had thus said, she turned herself back, and saw Jesus standing, and knew not that it was Jesus.

15. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? Whom seekest thou? She, supposing him to be the gardener, *rather*, "*the keeper of the garden*," saith unto him, Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away.

Not expecting Jesus to be restored to life, and not seeing him in his usual dress, she did not at first know him, but supposed that he was the proprietor of the garden, and had given directions for the removal of the body. But on Jesus' calling her by her name, her recollection instantly returns.

16. Jesus saith unto her, Mary! She turned herself and saith unto him, Rabboni, which is to say, Master.

Digitized by Google

The discovery was now complete, and Mary, in a transport of joy, was going to throw herself at the feet of her master, to express her affection and respect; but he checks her zeal, by desiring that she will not detain him at present, since he was not going to leave the world immediately, and she would have other opportunities of expressing her regard; but to go forthwith, to inform his disciples of the joyful event and of his approaching departure.

17. Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not, *rather*, "*let me alone*," for I am not yet ascended, "*I do not yet ascend*," to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God.

Go and tell my disciples that I am going hence, only to enjoy the same honours and privileges which are destined for them; for they are my brethren, and we have one common God and Father.

From this passage it is plain that Jesus regarded himself as one of the human race, and as possessing the same nature with other men; for he calls his disciples his brethren, and supposes that the privileges bestowed upon him by God were intended for them. Nothing could be more natural and encouraging than such language, considered as addressed from one human being to others; but the force of it is entirely destroyed, if we suppose him who uses it to be an angel or superangelic being in human shape; for beings of such different natures have no reason to expect the same honours or enjoyments.

18. Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and that he had spoken these things unto her.

Digitized by Google

REFLECTIONS.

1. The attachment of Mary to her master holds a conspicuous place in this narrative, as well as the honour which it received.

She is eager to seize the very first opportunity of showing respect to her deceased friend, by embalming or anointing his body, and when disappointed of this purpose, she weeps with sorrow, as if the most serious calamity had befallen her, and is inconsolable. So highly did she venerate the man who had just been crucified as a malefactor; so warm was her gratitude to the friend who had restored reason to her mind, when distracted with the most violent phrenzy, or, according to the language of the evangelists, had cast out of her seven dæmons.

Justly were such zeal and gratitude rewarded by the selection of Mary to be the first to whom Jesus should appear after his resurrection. To afford speedy relief to a mind overwhelmed with sorrow, was an act of mercy worthy of God; to honour virtuous friendship with some mark of peculiar attention, was becoming that Being, the great object of whose government is to promote virtue among his subjects.

Mary wept for what really afforded ground for joy; and in this respect is but too just a picture of many other mourners. "Why weepest thou?" may be addressed to them as well as to her: thy sorrow is misplaced or will soon be converted into joy. Indulge not a passion which may prove to be ill founded, and which will soon be converted into one of an opposite nature.

2. We may observe what substantial ground there is for believing the resurrection of Christ. It was not

Digitized by Google

an event that was expected or thought probable, and which, on that account, obtained easy credit; but wholly unthought of and unlooked for, which the disciples were slow to believe, and which they were only induced to receive in consequence of the irresistible force of evidence. Nor was it a story which was received without examination, and believed because it had been often told. But it excited the most eager curiosity and the strictest examination immediately. No sooner do the disciples hear that the body is removed, than they run with haste to satisfy themselves of the fact. Had any fraud been attempted, therefore, it could not fail to have been detected. A report which gained credit in such circumstances must be well founded.

3. Let us rejoice that the language which Christ addresses to his disciples is addressed to us, and that the comfort given to them is offered to us, if we are his genuine followers. We are the brethren of Christ, as well as they; and he is gone to his Father and our Father, to his God and our God. The same honour of rising again from the dead, and the same marks of the divine favour are intended for us as for him.

How delightful is the prospect which thus opens upon us—a being that will never end, the presence of God, the company of Christ, the society of virtuous and departed friends, and of all good men from every quarter of the globe and every period of time! Enjoyments great at present, and every moment increasing. Blessed be God for such a hope: let us think of it when we lie down and when we rise up, and never suffer it to depart from our minds.

John xx. 19. to the end.

In the former part of this chapter we had an account of the resurrection of Jesus, and of his appearing to Mary Magdalene. We have now a further

Digitized by Google

account of the manner in which he appeared to the apostles.

19. Then the same day, at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut, where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, came Jesus, and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you.

The meaning of these words is, as if a person should now say, All happiness be yours! Jesus seems to have appeared among his disciples before they were aware that he was in the room. As this happened notwithstanding that the doors had been shut, they must either have been opened for him in a miraculous manner, as some have supposed, or, he must have opened them himself without being perceived*.

But notwithstanding they heard him speak, and saw an evident resemblance, so little did they expect a resurrection from the dead, that they doubted whether it were he, supposing him to be some other man, strongly resembling him, or his ghost, an aërial substance, bearing his form, but without flesh and blood. To remove their doubts, he shows them marks of the violence which he had suffered in crucifixion.

20. And when he had so said, he showed unto them his hands and his side.

The marks of the wounds which he had received, but which were now healed, were sufficient to prove that he had been crucified, and consequently to identify his person, while his having flesh and bones would show that he was not what was called a ghost or spirit.

* Harmer's Observations, Vol. i. p. 207, &c.

Digitized by Google

Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord.

They were now convinced that it was really he, and rejoiced to behold him again.

21. Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you.

This he said after he had supped, and when he was about to leave them. It was a form of salutation when men separated, as well as when they met.

As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you.

I give you the same commission to preach, and the same power to work miracles in confirmation of your doctrine, which the Father gave me.

22. And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Spirit.

The word which stands for spirit in the language which Christ spoke upon this occasion, as well as in the English language, originally signified breath or wind, although it afterwards came to signify the divine power. In allusion to this meaning, Christ breathes or blows upon his disciples, at a time when he promised to them the Holy Spirit, as a symbol of their receiving it. Such symbolical actions frequently accompanied the predictions of the ancient prophets.

The next verse relates to the authority with which they were to be invested of preaching the gospel to all nations, and of admitting into the Christian church and rejecting from it whom they pleased.

23. Whomsoever's sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them, and whosoever's sins ye retain, they are retained.

Digitized by Google

In the language of the Jews, to be admitted into their church, and to partake of the privileges of divine revelation, was to be made holy. On the contrary, those who were without the pale of their church, as was the case with the heathen, were called unholy and sinners, by which term, however, was not meant any moral depravity, but merely being out of a state of privilege. While they remained in this state, their sins were unpardoned; but when taken out of it, their sins are said to be forgiven, they are sanctified and reconciled to God. This language is met with every where in Paul's epistles, and is authorized by Jesus himself, who told his disciples that he should be delivered into the hands of sinners, meaning thereby the Gentiles. It is to them, also, that he refers in this verse, where, by authorizing his disciples to remit the sins of whomsoever they pleased, he means to give them authority to receive Gentiles as well as Jews into the Christian church. But power to retain sins was authority to exclude those who did not conform to the terms which they prescribed. Hence it appears how unfounded those claims are which have been advanced, both by Protestants and Papists, on the authority of this text.

24. But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came.

Didymus is a Greek translation of the Hebrew word Thomas, which signifies twins; by the Greeks, it seems, he was called by the latter name; by the Hebrews, by the former.

25. The other disciples, therefore, said unto him, We have seen the Lord. But he said unto them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the

Digitized by Google

nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe.

Thomas had the testimony of ten men, his intimate companions, of whom he had no reason to suppose that they could be mistaken or intend to deceive, to the resurrection of Jesus; who told him that they had seen the Lord; but he declares that he will not believe it, unless he is furnished with proof from his own senses of the fact. His incredulity was certainly unreasonable, and proceeded from prejudices of which we are not informed. These prejudices, however, were not so obstinate as to be incapable of yielding to evidence, as we find by the sequel.

26. And after eight days, *rather, eight days after, or as we say,* "*on that day se'nnight,*" again his disciples were within, *within the house*, and Thomas with them. Then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you.

He stands in the midst of the company, as persons do who address a multitude and wish to be seen, and he begins with the same salutation as before: he came in, it is observed, as before, notwithstanding the doors were shut, and therefore by the same means.

27. Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side, and be not faithless, but believing; *or,* "*be not incredulous, but convinced.*"

He offers Thomas the very proof which he had required, and, by repeating his words, shows that he

Digitized by Google

knew what he had said, although at a distance; he then calls upon this disciple to say, whether, after having examined him in the way which he himself proposed, he was not his master.

28. And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God!

These words are no more than an exclamation of the apostle, the effect of sudden surprise and astonishment, to find the person whom he felt and handled to be his master raised from the dead. The sentence is evidently incomplete, and like other exclamations implies more than is expressed.

Some, however, consider the words as addressed to Christ, as if he had said, Thou art my Lord and my God, and deduce hence what they deem an irrefragable argument for the deity of Christ; but nothing can be more weak and inconclusive. That Thomas, a Jew, who had just notions of the spirituality and universal presence of the Supreme Being, should call a man who had been lately crucified and dead, his God, is utterly incredible.

29. Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me thou hast believed; blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed, "*and yet believe.*"

These words were intended as a mild reproof to Thomas for his incredulity; for they commend the faith of those who believe the resurrection of Jesus upon the testimony of others, without enjoying the evidence of sense. The reason of this commendation is evident; for such men show a greater love of truth, minds more free from prejudice, and more enlarged conceptions of divine power.

30. And many other signs truly

Digitized by Google

did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book.

31. But these are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that, believing, ye might have life through his name.

These verses relate not to what immediately precedes, but to the whole history, respecting which John tells us that it does not contain all the miracles which Jesus performed, but only a few; and those few are recorded to prove Jesus to be the Messiah, or, which is the same thing, the Son of God: for upon the belief of this truth depends our knowledge of the way which leads to eternal life. The name of Christ seems to be here put for Christ himself, just in the same manner as the name of God, in the Old Testament, frequently signifies the Divine Being.

REFLECTIONS.

1. This portion of scripture affords us fresh and more satisfactory evidence of that most important fact, the resurrection of our master. After appearing to Mary and some other disciples, separately, and in the morning, he meets the apostles, when assembled together, in the evening. He allows them time to recover from the surprise which would be occasioned by the first report of his being risen from the dead, leaves room for reflections on the nature and possibility of the fact, and for starting such doubts as might occur to thinking men, and then appears to them again, in order to remove their doubts and satisfy their inquiries

Digitized by Google

Here is no room left for saying that the disordered imagination of a woman, weeping for a friend whom she had lost, conjured up a phantom which had no reality; for he is seen and heard by ten persons at once, whose different imaginations could never concur in exhibiting the same things. Here is nothing left to be accounted for by a sudden illusion, which appears for a moment and then vanishes; but Jesus converses with his apostles for some time, and permits them to recover from their surprise and terror, if they felt any. Here is no forwardness to believe on the one side, nor any studied caution and concealment on the other; but the strictest inquiry is courted and called for. The proofs of the crucifixion of Christ are displayed before their eyes, without reserve; and, where the evidence of sight was not thought sufficient, the superior satisfaction arising from the sense of touch is likewise afforded. Surely we must say that to a fact the belief of which was established in this manner, nothing can be fairly objected.

2. The conduct of Jesus towards Thomas discovers much condescension: he would not believe the testimony of his fellow disciples, when they assured him that they had seen his master. In rejecting such testimony, he was influenced by unreasonable prejudices and was much to blame: but Jesus does not abandon him to his unbelief, as he might justly have done; but knowing him to be an honest, although mistaken man, appears again to his disciples for the express purpose of removing his doubts, and furnishing him with such evidence as he required.

Let us learn hence how to behave towards unbelievers in the gospel, or in the genuine doctrine which it contains: they are highly unreasonable in their demands, and are influenced by strong prejudices against the truth: but let us not on that account load them with reproaches, or despair of correcting their opinions. Many of them have upright minds, which only require to be better informed by patient instruction, in order to embrace the truth. If our first endeavours to

Digitized by Google

convince them should fail, let us not give up the work in despair; a second or third attempt may prove more successful. Such labours, it must be acknowledged, are painful and discouraging; but they are acts of enlightened benevolence, and are recommended to us by the highest example.

John xxi. 1—14.

The last appearance of Jesus to his disciples was at Jerusalem; but having directed them to go before him to Galilee, Matt. xxviii. 7. Mark xvi. 7. that they might meet him there, we now find him showing himself to them at the sea of Tiberias in that country.

1. After these things, Jesus showed himself to the disciples at the sea of Tiberias; and on this wise, "*in this manner*," showed he himself.

2. There were together Simon Peter and Thomas, called Didymus, and Nathaniel, of Cana in Galilee, and the sons of Zebedee, and two other of his disciples.

Nathaniel is here classed with the apostles, and was probably one of their number, although usually called by another name, that of Bartholomew.

3. Simon Peter saith unto them, I go, "*I will go*" a fishing. They say unto him, We also go with thee; "*We also will go with thee.*" They went forth and entered into a ship immediately, and that night they caught nothing.

Digitized by Google

While Jesus was with them, the apostles had been supported by him; but now he was gone they find it necessary to have recourse to their usual occupation for subsistence, and with this view go out in the boat which formerly belonged to them as fishermen, or in one which they hired.

4. But when the morning was now come, Jesus stood on the shore. But the disciples knew not that it was Jesus.

They were prevented from knowing him by his being at a considerable distance, and perhaps by its being not quite light.

5. Then Jesus saith unto them, Children, "*Sirs*," have ye any meat? *meaning to ask whether they had any fish:* they answered him, No.

6. And he said unto them, Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find.

They thought that this stranger might be well acquainted with the best place for fishing, and therefore complied with his directions.

They cast, therefore, and now they were not able to draw it, *that is, into the ship*, for the multitude of the fishes.

Such a great draught of fishes, after toiling all night without taking any thing, might well convince them that there was a miracle performed, and awaken their suspicions that this supposed stranger was Jesus.

Digitized by Google

7. Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved saith unto Peter, It is the Lord; "*It is our master.*" Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he girt his fisher's coat unto him, *rather*, "*he put on his upper coat,*" for he was naked, and did cast himself into the sea.

Peter is said to be naked, not because he was without clothes, but because he had stripped off his upper garment. In the same manner Saul is said to have been naked, when he had put off his upper garments, 1 Sam. xix. 24; and David to be uncovered, when he was only girded by a linen ephod, 2 Sam. vi. 14, 20. To dress himself in this manner, was indeed but a bad preparation for throwing himself into the water, but it was done out of respect to his master. For the same reason he could not wait for the slow arrival of the vessel at the shore, but leapt into the water, that he might be the first to welcome his approach.

8. And the other disciples came in a little ship, *rather*, "*in the boat,*" for they were not far from land, but, as it were, "*about,*" two hundred cubits, *one hundred and thirty English yards*, dragging the net with fishes.

The evangelist, after mentioning what Peter did, assigns the reasons why the others did not follow his example; they were but a short distance from shore, and were employed in dragging the fish, which could not have been brought in without their assistance.

9. As soon, then, as they were come to land, they saw a fire of coals

Digitized by Google

there and fish, "*a fish*," laid thereon and bread.

This seems to have been miraculously provided, as an entertainment for the disciples; but, as it was not sufficient for the whole company, Jesus desires them to bring some of the fish which they had just caught.

10. Jesus saith unto them, Bring of the fish which ye have now caught.

11. Simon Peter went up and drew the net to land, full of great fishes; a hundred and fifty three; and for all there were so many, yet was not the net broken.

This was a miraculous circumstance as well as the extraordinary draught of fishes. Naturalists inform us that one of the fish found at present in this sea of Galilee, commonly weighs about thirty pounds*. Were the whole number of this, or indeed of much inferior weight, nothing less than a miracle could prevent the net from being broken. Peter is said to have drawn it to land; not that it was done by him alone, for the others no doubt assisted him; but he was the leader and director in the business.

12. Jesus saith unto them, Come and dine, *or*, "*come and breakfast*;" *for it was now early in the morning.*

This invitation shows that he ate with them, although that is not expressly mentioned by the evangelist.

And none of the disciples durst ask him, *or*, "*ventured to ask him*," Who

* Harmer's Observations, Vol. ii. p. 200.

Digitized by Google

art thou? knowing that it was the Lord.

The reason why they did not ask him was that it was unnecessary; for they were sure of the fact.

13. Jesus then cometh, and taketh bread, and giveth them; and fish likewise.

14. This is now the third time that Jesus showed himself to his disciples after he was risen from the dead.

The writer means that this was the third time that he appeared to his disciples when most of them were assembled together; for he has himself before recorded more than three appearances, including those which Jesus made to individuals.

REFLECTIONS.

1. The simple and artless narrative which we have been reading, carries with it plain marks of authenticity and truth. Minute circumstances are mentioned, which an impostor would have been careful to avoid, and which it would have occurred to no person to relate, except an eye-witness; such a witness John must have been; and therefore we may depend upon the truth of what he says. This remark we have had occasion to make before; but the present story suggests it again to the mind, and gives it additional weight. Thus it is that this history proves itself as it were, and renders external evidence of its authority almost unnecessary.

Digitized by Google

2. We are here furnished with fresh and more convincing evidence of the resurrection of Jesus: he shows himself to be the same person, not only by his looks, by his voice, by his manner, which were sufficient to convince every reasonable person of the fact, but likewise by working miracles. These he had been before authorized to perform, to prove that God had sent him to be a divine teacher; and that which he now wrought might answer the same purpose; but it would likewise answer the further end of proving that he was the person who was crucified; for if not, Heaven itself countenances an impostor, by enabling a man who pretended to be Jesus, but was not really he, to alter or suspend the course of nature, and hereby give its sanction to the belief of a lie. If such a supposition is utterly incredible, then Jesus is the person that he appeared to be. Heaven honours him with fresh testimonials of its regard, to prove that he stands as high in its favour now as before his death, and to remove all doubts about the identity of his person. Let us rejoice in this new evidence of that very important event: he performs the same miracles at the close of his ministry as at the beginning, by causing his disciples to inclose an extraordinary draught of fishes; a thing that would never have occurred to any other person to perform; and he has the same design in both—to assure them of the great success which they would have in preaching the gospel; that henceforth they were to become the fishers of men, and to inclose in their net a vast multitude of people.

John xxi. 15. to the end.

In the first part of this chapter we have an account of Christ's appearing to his disciples at the sea of Tiberias; of his furnishing them with a miraculous draught of fishes, and sitting down to eat with them. The repast being over, he now proceeds to the business for the sake of which this appearance had partly been made, by exhorting Peter to instruct his disci-

Digitized by Google

ples, and by forewarning him of the manner of his death.

15. So when they had dined, "*when the meal was ended*," Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these?

That is, than these nets or these fishes? Art thou more attached to me than to the instruments or profits of thy profession? This was a very natural question, considering that Peter had just returned to his trade of fishing, and it might appear doubtful whether he did not prefer that employment to his office as an apostle, the more especially as he had lately been guilty of so great a crime in denying his master.

He saith unto him, Yea, Lord, thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs.

Instruct and strengthen the converts to my religion. Peter is here exhorted to feed the lambs, and in the next verse the sheep; but the same persons are intended in both places *.

16. He saith to him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord, thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my sheep.

17. He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?

In putting the same question to Peter three times, Jesus is supposed to allude to his denying him as many

* Matt. x. 16. Luke x. 3.

Digitized by Google

times, intimating hereby that there ought to be repeated asseverations, where there had been repeated denials. Peter was hurt to find that his answers did not afford satisfaction, and that his attachment was called in question.

Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? and he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee.

The words, Thou knowest all things, applied by Peter to Jesus, refer to nothing more than his being acquainted with the thoughts of men, as well as with their external conduct, of which he had given several proofs in the course of his ministry, particularly in foretelling the cowardice of Peter. That they are not to be taken in an unlimited sense, as if he knew every thing that was the object of knowledge, is evident hence, that so understood they are inconsistent with the language of Christ himself, who declares that he did not know the time of the day of judgment.

Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep.

These repeated exhortations seem intended by Jesus to encourage Peter to resume the office of a Christian instructor, which, overwhelmed with grief and shame for his late miscarriage, he might now be inclined to abandon.

18. Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest.

Christ is here supposed to allude to what Peter had just done, when he girt on his upper coat, verse the

Digitized by Google

seventh, and threw himself into the sea, in order that he might be the first to meet his master. Such was the liberty of going where he pleased, which he now enjoyed, while he was young; but a period of severe restraint was approaching.

But when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not.

19. This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God.

We are told that at Rome, the place where Peter was put to death, it was usual for a malefactor to carry through the streets a yoke upon his neck, to the extremities of which his hands were fastened, and that afterwards he was made to carry his cross to the place of execution. This custom may serve to explain what is meant in this place by stretching out the hands before crucifixion. Being girt by another, refers to being bound as a prisoner, and the being carried whither he would not, to being led to crucifixion; for, however patiently he might submit to it, it was not an event which he wished for. This prediction of a violent death was very properly subjoined to a declaration of attachment on the part of Peter, as what would put his affection to the test. For any one to lay down his life in support of a revelation from God, is to give the highest possible proof of the sense which he entertains of its excellence and value, and therefore to do it honour, and, consequently, to do honour to the Being from whom it comes. In this way did Peter glorify God by his death.

After this, Jesus, in order to give Peter a fuller idea of what he was to expect, rises up and walks, desiring this apostle to follow him; intending, by that symbolical act, to represent to him that he must prepare to follow him to sufferings and death.

Digitized by Google

And when he had spoken this, he saith unto him, Follow me.

20. Then Peter, turning about, seeth the disciple whom Jesus loved following, which also leaned on his breast, "*who had also laid himself before his breast*," at supper, and said, Master, which is he that betrayeth thee?

These are the terms in which John, the writer of this history, usually describes himself; his motive for following his master was probably to hear what he would say to Peter.

21. Peter, seeing him, saith unto Jesus, Master, what shall this man do?

Some choose to render it "What shall this man suffer?" supposing Peter to refer to his own sufferings, which Jesus had just foretold, and to inquire whether John was to suffer any thing of the same kind.

22. Jesus saith unto him, If I will, "*if I wish*," that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? Follow thou me.

If I have a desire that he should continue in life till I come for the destruction of Jerusalem, how does that concern thee? Attend to what is thy own duty, by following me, and not to what respects him. John, we are told, survived the destruction of Jerusalem, and was the only one of the apostles who lived so long.

23. Then went this saying abroad

Digitized by Google

among the brethren, that that disciple should not die: yet Jesus said not unto him, He shall not die; but, If I desire that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?

By the coming of Christ many of the early Christians understood the final judgment; they therefore inferred from what he had said of John that he was to live till that event; but he spoke only of his living to a much inferior and earlier event, and of that only conditionally, *If* I desire that he should tarry; without saying that he should desire it. On both accounts, therefore, the inference was without foundation.

24. This is the disciple which testifieth of these things, and wrote these things; and we know that his testimony is true.

The writer asserts that he is competent to contradict the report, because he was the person respecting whom the declaration was made, and knows it to be what he has stated. From the plural number being used here, *we* know, it has been inferred by some that this chapter was not written by John himself, but by some members of the church of Ephesus after his death; but there seems to be no foundation for the inference; for it is very common for writers to speak of themselves in the plural number, and the practice has been adopted by this very writer, 3 John 12, Yea, and we also bear record, and ye know that our record is true.

25. And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could

Digitized by Google

not contain the books that should be written. Amen.

These words are considered by many as nothing more than a strong hyperbole, in which more is expressed than is to be literally understood; and they observe that, however harsh it may appear, in European languages, to say that to write a particular account of all the actions of Christ would fill more books than the world would hold, such strong figures are sufficiently familiar in the language of the East. Others, however, suppose, and I conceive with reason, that the difficulty which appears in this passage may be removed by a more correct translation, thus; And there are also many other things which Jesus did; but if they were written every one, I do not think that the world, even then, would receive the books which had been written *.

According to this translation, the evangelist, at the close of his history, assigns the reason why he has not related more particulars in the life of Jesus, and declares it to be his opinion that if such an enlarged narration had been written, it would not satisfy the doubts and remove the cavils of the unbelieving world; and that therefore he had contented himself with a shorter account, which was sufficient to satisfy all reasonable persons.

REFLECTIONS.

1. Let us remember the test of affection which Jesus proposes to Peter, and consider it as addressed to ourselves, no less than to him; Feed my sheep and my lambs. The best method of showing our regard to him is zealously to espouse and promote the object

* See Wakefield's translation and his Silva Critica, P. ii. pp. 46, 47.

Digitized by Google

which he has most at heart, which is the advancement of the interests of piety and virtue in every human breast, and, as the means of accomplishing it, the diffusion of Christian knowledge. Our attention to these objects will afford him more pleasure, and do more to secure his favour, than any professions of attachment, however warm. If we have fallen into errors or miscarriages ourselves, the best atonement which we can now make is to endeavour to guard or recover others from the like faults. Let every disciple of Christ, then, who has acquired superior knowledge, or made superior attainments in virtue, labour to communicate the benefit of his knowledge and his virtues to others. Let him remove the misconceptions of the ignorant, and satisfy the doubts of the serious inquirer after truth. Where the dawnings of virtue in the mind have made their appearance, let their progress be aided; where the resolution to pursue the right path is formed, but weak and wavering, let it be confirmed and strengthened. Let no one complain of the want of objects for such labours; they are to be found wherever there is error, weakness or ignorance, in every rank and condition of life, but more especially among young persons. Let none be neglected as beneath notice, however young in age, however mean in condition, however ignorant and uninformed: the more wretched their condition, the more deserving are they of pity: or, if you feel not yourselves inclined to help them from motives of benevolence, remember that they are the sheep and lambs of Christ, and that he requires attention to them as proofs of regard to himself. How indefatigable Peter was in obeying this command of his master we know from the history of his life; and he exhorts all Christian elders to imitate his example: Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind, neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock; and when the chief shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away. 1 Pet. ii. 3, 4.

Digitized by Google

2. Let the view here given us of martyrdom, as glorifying God and following Christ, reconcile our minds to that, or like painful events, if we should be ever called to them. To suffer in the cause of Christian truth, shows the deep sense which we entertain of its importance and value, and cannot fail to make a strong impression in its favour upon the minds of spectators. By this means we may more effectually recommend it to their regard than by the best instructions and the most laborious exertions, continued through a long life. Why, therefore, if our object be to glorify God, should we decline that way of doing it which is most speedy and efficacious? It is also treading in the steps of our master, the Son of God, the favorite of Heaven, by which he rose still higher in the divine favour. We are hereby rendered like him, and may look for the like reward. Let us follow the Lamb, therefore, whithersoever he may go, although he lead us to sufferings and death; for it is the road to glory.

3. Let the severe reproof given to Peter, for desiring to know what would become of his fellow disciple, teach us to check curious inquiries respecting future events and the decrees of Providence: such inquiries, if not positively criminal, are at least impertinent and useless: they discover a mind more concerned about what will happen to others than about what we should do ourselves. At the proper season, the designs of Providence will be unfolded: to endeavour to anticipate them, would only fill our minds with much useless anxiety. It is our place faithfully to discharge our duty, and to leave future events, whether they respect the church or individuals, to the disposal of Providence, who will, no doubt, order them for the best.

Digitized by Google

We are now come to the end of John's history, and to the close of the four evangelists, which contain an account of the mission, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus. I have taken no notice of Mark, because his history corresponds almost entirely with that of Matthew, but have expounded such parts of Luke as are not to be found in the other evangelists. Matthew and John have been taken throughout, and in this manner an exposition has been given of every material transaction or discourse in the four gospels. Such reflections as each part suggested I have endeavoured to state as we proceeded. But I cannot leave this part of the New Testament, without mentioning one or two, which appear to me to result from the whole.

The first inference which I shall make is that the history of Jesus, as contained in the evangelists, is founded upon facts, and therefore a true history. The character of Jesus here exhibited is so new and extraordinary, so different from and superior to what is given of any of the ancient prophets, or to what the Jews expected in their Messiah; so full of piety and benevolence, but so free from austerity and superstition; such a happy union of meekness and dignity, maintained throughout with so much propriety and consistency, as to be far above the invention of illiterate fishermen, and clearly to prove that they only copied some great original. The exhibition of such a character, by such men, is itself a proof of the truth of their history. The minute detail of particulars which they have given us, the unreserved disclosure of all kinds of circumstances, without concealing such as might be deemed unfavourable to their own characters, or that of their master, is a plain mark of men writing from a real train of events,

Digitized by Google

and not from imagination; who wished to communicate nothing but the truth. The variations which are to be found in the different evangelists, in regard to less matters in the life of Christ, while there is a general agreement in respect to the main circumstances, although it destroy all claim to inspiration in their writings, yet, instead of lessening their credibility, serves to increase it; for it shows that in these cases they did not borrow from each other, but each wrote from his own knowledge. Hence, instead of having the testimony of one evangelist only to the principal facts in the life of Christ, which must have been the case if they had exactly agreed, we have the testimony of three, if not four, independent evidences.

But I add, secondly, that, however highly the evangelists have taught us to think of the character of Jesus, it is still the character of A MAN. Nothing occurs in the course of the history which would lead one to suppose that he was God in human shape, an angel, or a superangelic being; but many things are mentioned which prove that he was one of the human race; for he is described as having the same appetites with other men, as being subject to the same infirmities, as hungry and thirsty, faint and weary, sensible of pain and liable to death. We find him enlivened with joy, oppressed with sorrow, alarmed with fears, and melting into sympathy like other men, and only distinguished from them by the excellence of his character and his miraculous powers. The former they teach us to consider as the result of his own endeavours, and of the extraordinary circumstances in which he was placed; nor have we reason to suppose that it was beyond the attainment of other men, with the like extraordinary advantages. The latter he plainly and repeatedly ascribes entirely to God.

Respecting his supposed pre-existence, the three first evangelists are observed to maintain a profound silence, a circumstance which of itself amounts to a

Digitized by Google

demonstration that he was not understood to claim such dignity; for if he had, it could not have failed to be recorded by those who professed to write a complete history of his life. Not a word has escaped from them which can be supposed to allude to such a doctrine: it is only inferred from obscure hints in the discourses of Jesus, as communicated by John, by whom his language is, however, uniformly represented as highly figurative. On this subject, nevertheless, his figures are easily interpreted without having recourse to any such supposition. By the phrases, "coming forth from God," "being sent by God into the world," "coming from above," "coming down from heaven," with others of a like nature, we have seen that nothing more was intended by Jesus than his having a commission from God, to instruct mankind and to work miracles. In this sense they seem to have been understood by his own disciples, who never give any intimation that they considered themselves as conversing with an angel, or with any thing different from a human being. His enemies, indeed, who always sought to pervert his words, did sometimes endeavour to affix a different construction to his language, as well as some sensual Jews, who followed him for the sake of the loaves and fishes: but those who were best acquainted with his language, and most likely to allow it a fair and candid interpretation, give it no such meaning. Yet upon the slight foundation of these few figurative passages in an evangelist, has been built the stupendous doctrine that a great pre-existent spirit, the Creator of the world and the governor of the universe, left this state of super-eminent glory, to come into our world, to form an incongruous union with a human body, to appear as an infant, to grow up as a man, in short, to live and die here; a fact which at first view must appear highly improbable, as having nothing like it in the past dispensations of Providence, where men were always employed to deliver divine messages, and which, therefore, ought not, cer-

Digitized by Google

tainly, to be admitted but upon the strongest evidence. Whether such evidence is to be found in the evangelists, I shall now leave to you to determine. What proofs there may appear of it in the subsequent history, we shall have occasion to observe when we come to that part of the scriptures.

END OF VOL. II.

J. Belcher & Son, Printers, Birmingham.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

2 5 1982

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google